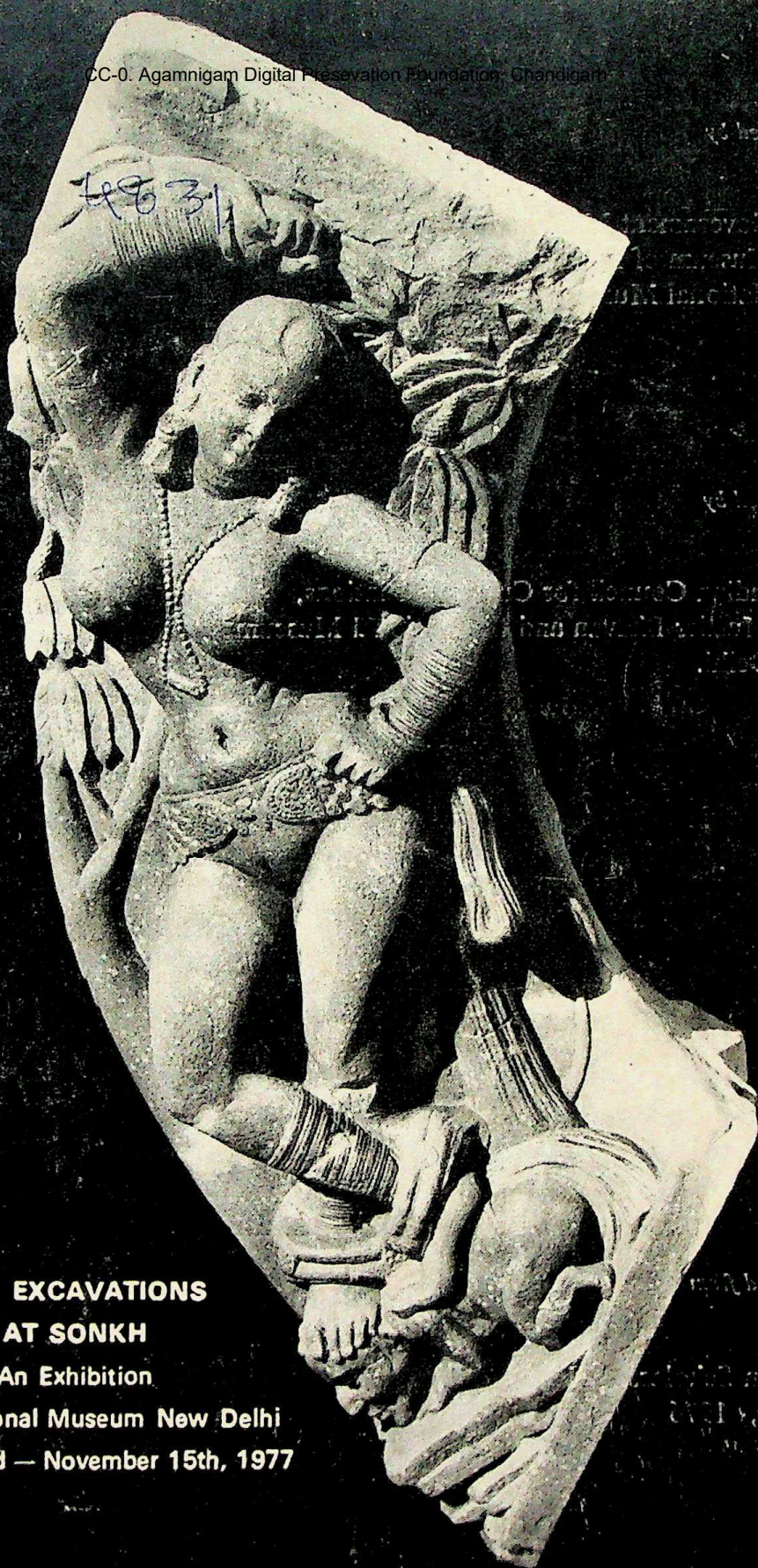




**THE EXCAVATIONS
AT SONKH**

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SOME RESULTS OF THE EXCAVATIONS AT SONKH A Preliminary Report

BY

HERBERT HÄRTEL (Berlin)

For eight years in succession, from 1966 to 1974, the mound of Sonkh near Mathurā has been the site of an increasingly interesting excavation in every winter and spring. Assisted by 150-180 skilful Indian workers a team of German archaeologists, under the leadership of the author, exposed level upon level of archaeologically significant habitations. The work started under an agreement with the Government of India and was sponsored by two German foundations, viz. the German Research Society (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) and the Prussian Cultural Trust (Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz). The team consisted of the excavation leader, two architects and one ceramic designer, photographer and excavation technician each. With the help of scholarships made available by the German Academic Exchange Service, the experts were joined every winter by one or two German students of Indian art and archaeology.

In India the undertaking had received support from many sides. The assistance rendered by official bodies — especially the curator and staff of the Mathurā Museum and the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India — was greatly appreciated by the excavators. In a most selfless way, the members of the Cultural Department of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in New Delhi made the excavation a part of their own work.

The preliminary report is divided into two parts. Firstly, it gives information about the diggings at the main mound of Sonkh and secondly, it deals with the results of the excavation work on an additional site, a "mud island" situated in the fields outside the proper area of the mound. As the material obtained from the excavation is not yet completely interpreted, the conclusions drawn may not be taken as final in all cases.

I

THE EXCAVATION AT THE MAIN MOUND OF SONKH

1. The Site

As one of the most important cultural centres of ancient India Mathurā had indeed earned the attention of the archaeologists since a long time. The only question for us was which of those numerous sites should be selected for our purpose. Since our main interest was aimed at finding architectural structures and other remains belonging to the earliest history of Mathurā — when it was looked upon as *sarveṣām daivatīrthāṇām māthuram paranam mahat* — it seemed advisable to look for some more undisturbed mounds than those in the city itself. And among all the possible places, the vast artificial plateau within the fields of Sonkh, some eight miles south of the holy Govardhan, attracted our attention most (fig. 1). In his "Mathura: A District Memoir" (3rd Ed. 1883, vol. II, p. 383), F.S. Growse remarks: "This (Sonkh) lies immediately under the Khera or site of the old fort, of which some crumbling walls and bastions still remain. It was built by a Jāt named Hati Singh, of the time of Suraj Mall of Bharatpur, or Jawahir Singh; but the Khera itself must be many hundreds of years older." Growse's opinion was corroborated by surface finds of Śuṅga and Kuṣāṇa terracotta pieces, fragments of Kuṣāṇa sculptures and older potsherds. Thus, it was of high interest to verify the archaeological importance of the Sonkh mound and to obtain details about its historical sequences.

The mound mentioned by Growse consists of a plateau which originally was of the size of at least 200,000 sqm, but is now diminished to a large extent. However, about 75,000 sqm of the old mound still exist surrounded by fields; the town of Sonkh itself is partly built on the extensions of the mound. On this plane rises an elevation measuring 100 x 90 m, which was built over in younger times with fortifications and corner towers and has the appearance of a citadel.

A most extensive survey of this area was undertaken in order to facilitate systematic digging operations. The site (fig. 2) was divided into 100 m and 20 m squares.

2. The Digging Procedure

In the winter of 1966/67, we laid a trench of 36 x 5 m in the northern

slope of the elevation and, in a small sectional area, reached the natural soil at a depth of 17,20 m. It was thereby established that, but for few interruptions, the mound of Sonkh had been colonized continuously for over 2,700 years. Its latest constructions belong to the 19th century. The oldest level showed large masses of Painted Grey Ware, mingled with Black and Red ceramics. Specially conspicuous was a metre-high succession of different brickworks located at the foot of the citadel elevation which, judging from the relevant finds, must have belonged to the Kuṣāṇa and pre-Kuṣāṇa periods.

The result of the first campaign instigated us to carry out, during the following winter season, horizontal diggings in the north-east part of the citadel in an area of altogether 4,000 sqm. In the beginning, it was a rather troublesome task because the successive levels of structures in the heart of the mound were mostly destroyed. It was only at Level 16, counting from above, that the area was filled with the remains of walls which yielded at last the complete outline of a section of a town. Through the exposure of the building levels step by step, and with the help of the findings gathered from two additional trial trenches laid in the west and south slope of the citadel elevation, we were able to determine the complete sequence of the colonizations, namely, the mound of Sonkh contains, from the highest to the deepest, the following 40 levels:

1—5 Jāt, 6—7 Islamic, 8—11 Late to Early Mediaeval, 12—13 Post-Gupta, 14—15 Gupta, 16—22 Kuṣāṇa, 23—26 Pre-Kuṣāṇa to Post-Śuṅga, 27—28 Late Śuṅga, 29—30 Middle Śuṅga, 31—32 Early Śuṅga, 33—34 Maurya, 35—36 Pre- and Early Maurya, 37—40 Painted Grey and Black and Red Ware Periods.

Each one of the levels has its more or less special features which are reflected, above all, in the building-structures and in the objects found. But simultaneously, the conceptual interrelation of certain groups of levels became apparent which, in most cases, turned out to belong to a ruling dynasty. In the following an attempt will be made to describe some of the site's historical phases.

3. Brief Account of Structural Remains

Early mud and mud-brick phases

The early phases of settlements within the mound of Sonkh, Levels 40 to 37, belong to the Painted Grey Ware Period. Within the area under

excavation no remains of mud or mud-brick walls were noted. The only remains of brick-like pieces of mud seem to belong to fire-places in the outskirts of ~~Pant-Gupta~~ Sonkh. But it is uncertain if the absence of wall remains is due to the limited area or to the predominance of other building techniques at such an early stage. Several post-holes and reed-impressions in mud-pieces suggest a kind of houses constructed in more perishable materials. An interesting feature within Level 40 is a system of two parallel running ditches of different width and depth with a small rampart in between. Judged by the situation of the finds they are part of the northern enclosure of the habitated area at the starting point of civilisation at Sonkh.

Beginning with the early Maurya time (Levels 36 to 35) mud became the prevailing material for the construction of houses. Up to Level 30, to be dated into the middle of the Śunga time, houses had a similar appearance. They were built of thick mud-walls, sometimes a bit sloping on the outside. The inner walls, as could be noted in some cases, were covered with mud-plaster mixed with chaff. In spite of the uniform material a large variety of groundplans was detected within the different cross-sections. The most remarkable one was found in Level 35. Its groundplan is circular with an outer diameter of about 3,75 m (fig. 3). A thick layer of ashes within the walls and the burnt mud-plaster on the inner sides allow the conclusion that the roof consisting of a wooden construction covered with reed was destroyed by fire. Another type, 4,50 m wide and, as far as it could be excavated, at least 5 m long, shows an unusually large size for a single room.

The houses of Levels 29 and 28, built for the first time in mud-bricks, follow a pattern which forms with some modifications the base for the layout of Level 27, the mud-bricks measuring 42 x 28 cm. Burnt bricks of the same size come into existence in Level 28, specially for the construction of drains and wells.

House-building in constructional units

An important change in the building practice was effected in Level 27 in so far as, for the first time, houses were chiefly built of baked bricks (fig. 4). The excavated structural remains of this level give testimony of an imaginative method of construction changing in the lay-out of the groundplan from unit to unit. The building principle is clear: at first separate houses of two or three rooms were erected and adjusted to each other according to the space required. Such houses were connected by

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plain walls so that a sort of enclosed plot of land came into existence which cannot as yet be called a farmstead in the later sense of the term. The plots follow one another in a row and are enclosed on two sides by streets. A section of Level 27 may illustrate (fig. 5) how the groundplans were laid out.

The street running from the north-west to the south-east is bounded on its north-side by Plots A and B. The excavated structures form a compact block which is separated in the north by a long wall running from west to east. The most remarkable part of Plot A is a hall opening towards the south and measuring 2,70 x 6,50 m. It is furnished with a carefully laid baked brick flooring. On the right and left of a brick pillar there is an opening each 1,90 m wide leading towards a large court, the old pavement of which is still preserved in parts. The extensive paved area of the court, measuring 10 m in the north-south and about 5 m in the east-west direction, necessitated the laying out of a drainage channel. Most probably the channel was open in the courtyard; in the hall itself, however, which it crossed slightly diagonically, it was ingeniously embedded in the baked brick pavement and covered by bricks. It drained towards the north through a breach in the northern wall of the hall. In the west of the court area is a group of three rooms nearly equal in size. They are separated from the southern chambers by a thoroughfare, paved and appr. 0,90 m wide, which leads to the court from the west. The first room has its approach from the inner court, the second and the third rooms are to be entered from the western side. In addition to its approximately 1,10 m wide door-opening in the west, the third room has still another access from the south which is 0,70 m wide. A fire-place built of baked bricks standing upright with a clay lining was found here. The south-door connects this chamber directly across a passage with the middle one of the three store-rooms forming the southern front. The court is bounded in the east through a long closed wall without any door-opening. Behind the same there extends another residential unit (B) connected to Plot A by a path, 0,90 m wide, which runs along the northern terminating wall of the whole complex of buildings. While the access to Unit A leads through a narrow lane, Unit B is entered through a room (2,40 x 4,40 m) which also serves as a passage. The width of the entrance from the street is only 0,65 m, whereas the passage towards the inner courtyard is 1,60 m wide. The next house, also situated parallel to the street and having a passage to another open yard, can be reached over this longish inner court which is

enclosed on all four sides. Such a structural design well facilitates a gradual transition from a public to a private area, and it also allows the division of a building complex into different parts.

The other building complexes in Level 27 are arranged in a similar way as the plots described above. Some of the houses show a kind of special comfort. They have a water room with a deep well made of terracotta rings. It is remarkable that this well is always placed in the south-west room of the house, showing thereby a conformity with later constructions, in which water jars were found placed in the south-west chamber.

The house-building in constructional units must have been determined by the roof structures available which necessitated the narrow intermediate spaces between the units as is recognisable in the sketch. The houses were furnished with gable-roofs and covered with roof-tiles. Judging from the opening of the ridge-tile the inclination was about 30 degrees. As shown in fig. 6 along with the types of roof-tiles¹ used about two or three pinacles were attached to the ridge.

As the roofing of houses joining each other in a right angle was apparently difficult to cope with, rectangular groups of rooms were built and attention was given to adequate spacing so as to allow sufficient projection for the slanting roof. This method was followed also in Levels 26 and 25 so that the Level group 27 to 25 should be considered as a unit on grounds of building technique. The dating of these levels into the first three quarters of the first century B.C. will be proved in Chapter 4.

Farmsteads of the Pre-Kuṣāṇa and Kuṣāṇa Period

If Levels 27 to 25 were connected together rather closely, this can similarly be claimed for Levels 24 and 23. In comparison to the older ground-plans, the houses now appear to be irregularly placed, at least the streets and lanes are more crooked and the houses are arranged around open grounds (fig. 7). Real farmsteads emerge through the grouping of the rooms around an inner courtyard. The outer walls run generally parallel and the farmsteads are separated from one another by open areas and narrow gaps. This technique of construction begins in the older Level 24 which, by the dense interlocking and the re-use of its walls, is closely connected with Level 23. Several houses belonging to the oldest phase of

1. The normal tiles are generally 33 X 22 cm in size.

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habitation in that level show two peculiarities of construction and lay-out which we come across only here: they are built in sections and protected at the street-corners with large stones against damages by vehicles (bullock-carts). Vertical joints, 2 cm wide, prove that single rows of rooms were joined together. The position of the corner-stones discloses the direction of the street, and the houses are as stable as the older ones. The sizes of the bricks measure between $40 \times 25 \times 5$ cm and $42 \times 26 \times 6$ cm. The most complete house (A) contains in its south-west corner a combined bathroom and toilet, i.e. a luxury unknown in the later constructions. The bathroom, carefully paved with baked bricks, can be reached only from the court-yard through the toilet. The water drained to the street while the excrements of the toilet remained in a pit. Two bricks in the form of a trapeze mark the squatting place. On the floor of the toilet room stood two water-jars — one for cold and one for hot water (mica vessel with burnt bottom). The roofs had probably been covered with some other material as not even a single roof-tile was found in this level. The space between the inner rows of rooms in House A of Level 23 gives rise to the conjecture that these houses were also equipped with gable-roofs for which, however, there is no evidence.

The Level-group 24 to 23 belongs still to the Pre-Kuṣāṇa time whereas Levels 22 to 16 are to be placed collectively into the Kuṣāṇa Period. While Level 22 takes over in a transition stage the size of bricks from the preceding Level 23, the houses of Level 21 to 16 are made of bricks having the size of $37 \times 23 \times 5$ cm. The seven levels belonging to the Kuṣāṇa time show a more or less densely built up area of houses. Occasionally, there is a working area without building or an open space joined by several streets and lanes.

Not all of the Kuṣāṇa levels are equally well preserved. Layers of ashes and other residues indicate that the one or other structure was destroyed by force. Quite often, the older building materials were re-used for a new settlement. The classification of the individual levels is facilitated by the circumstance that each of them was rebuilt according to a fixed plan after the older area was filled up and levelled. Every now and again the rows of walls in the new structures coincided with those of the preceding ones, since the approximately north-western direction of buildings was adhered to throughout the Kuṣāṇa settlement in Sonkh; the old walls could, therefore, be re-used as foundations. Where the building-plan differed, new

foundations were laid without any consideration to the older constructions, quite often piercing through the old brickwork.

When one compares the different successive groundplans of the structures in the exposed area, the similarities of conception in the lay-outs become clear. They consist in the structure system of the farmsteads and their grouping around open places and lanes. The essential constituents of the closed and walled-in farmsteads are the courtyard and the southern row of rooms; in larger houses an additional residential wing appears on the western and often a separate domestic wing on the eastern side of the court. Generally, the entrances are approached from the lane or from the open place; the shops are also situated along the street. The function of the individual rooms is not fixed — only the south-west chamber of all the houses seems to have served as the room for water or as a bathroom as well. The comfort and the stability were greater in the older buildings than in those of Levels 21 to 16, which give an appearance of uniformity by the use of bricks of equal size and a ground-plan hardly ever changed. All the same, differences can be found here too. When comparing the construction of Level 21 with that of the younger Level 16, the more spacious and freer arrangement of structures within the same area becomes conspicuous in the older habitation (fig. 8). The ground-plan of Level 16 shows the most developed and also the most systematic lay-out. What is remarkable here is that the single houses come to be built more closely together leaving a narrow gap of about 30 cm from one house-wall to the other.

Apsidal Temple No. 1 in the habitation area of ancient Sonkh

The groundplans show the alterations in the structures of the seven Kuṣāṇa levels. Not a single house has been preserved throughout all these levels. Only one particular building remained in one and the same place: the structure marked as temple on the open place partly surrounded by houses. It is a building of worship, rebuilt, extended and overbuilt, and with the remains of an apsidal wall which opens towards the east (fig. 9). The sides of the apse were destroyed in the 18th century by deepening a ditch. In the course of digging, three parallel boundary walls of the apse, placed side by side, and at least four super-structures on these walls were exposed. Finally the preserved parts of the inner apsidal wall appeared 3,20 m high also showing several constructional changes. This building is situated, in all probability, in the centre of the successive settlements of the city and was

dedicated to a Hinduistic cult. A stone relief of a sitting Mātrikā, 19 cm high, with two adorants on each side was found on the floor belonging to Phase 4, just in front of a platform constructed as a sort of altar in the curve of the apse. It was probably re-installed from building stage to building stage. To our knowledge, this structure, at the time of discovery, was the first Hinduistic Kuṣāṇa brick temple in the Mathurā district. Its dimensions of 8,85 x 9,85 m proved to be rather small. Most certainly, the temple in its oldest shape existed already in the early Kuṣāṇa period. At that time, measuring only 7,20 x 6 m, the temple was even substantially smaller. To avoid demolishing the walls and other structures resting upon and interlocked in one another, the team could not lay open the deepest foundations. It would have, in fact, meant the pulling-down of nearly all later parts of the masonry. For the time being, the different constructional stages can be ascribed to the following individual levels: Phase 1 = Level 21; super-structures to Phase 1 = Level 20 to 19; Phase 2 = Level 18; Phases 3 and 4 = Level 17; Phases 5 and 6 = Level 16; Phase 7 = Level 15. At least two building phases may still be lying underground; this is indicated by a few temporarily exposed wall-remains running radially towards the apse and possibly leading to a shrine of rectangular shape. One is, therefore, tempted to conclude that this temple perhaps contained a rectangular altar-niche. However, the rotunda of the apse, built upon this niche, has such short side-walls that one could rather call it a shrine with a round altar-niche.

Buildings and fortifications of later periods

In contrast to the periods dealt with so far, the buildings of Levels 15 to 1 are preserved in more or less scanty wall-remains which in a few cases only allow the sketching of a groundplan. At the present stage of analysis of sketches and levelling, only so much can be said that the excavated area consisted of residential premises of large dimensions in medieval and late medieval times.

The central elevation of the mound was built over with a fortress of the 18th century. It is this Old Fort which was erected by a Jāt named Hati Singh at the time of Suraj Mall of Bharatpur, or Jawahir Singh as mentioned by F. S. Growse. Eight iron cannon balls with a diameter measuring 16 cm were found lying in the fort or stuck in the outside walls. They appear to have been witnesses of the destruction of the fort by the Marathas in 1770.

4. Some Historical Problems in the Light of the Sonkh Excavations

The earliest levels

In the chapter on the digging procedure we have dealt briefly with the sequence of levels in the mound of Sonkh. It is, however, necessary to discuss their inner relations in detail because the continuous succession of levels has led to some significant historical knowledge. A tabular synopsis (fig. 10) reflecting the sequence will illustrate the observations.

The natural soil had been reached in Sonkh in four cuttings lying far apart from each other. At all these spots the earliest levels of settlements were marked through more or less numerous fragments of Painted Grey and Black and Red Ware. In the largest cutting, i.e. in square 3 I — 3 II/Ca, four successive Painted Grey Levels were ascertained (40-37) in a deposit of yellow sand having an average height of 1,20 m. The Painted Grey Ware in all the four levels appears to be mixed with Black and Red Ware. Two charcoal samples found at different places in Levels 39 or 38 yielded radiocarbon dates of 620 and 575 B.C. As no charcoal was found in the deeper and higher Painted Grey Levels, i.e. in 40 and 37, we must consider these dates as indicating the middle of the period in question. Even at a generously hypothetical assumption of 200 years towards each side of the middle date, we do not come to any time older than 800 B.C. for the beginning of the Painted Grey settlement at the old Sonkh. Still more interesting appears the question how long the Painted Grey and Black and Red Ware Period continued. Corresponding to the hypothetical assumption we would have to arrive at a dating of about 400 B.C. Unfortunately, it cannot be said with certainty whether Level 36 followed directly on the uppermost Painted Grey Level 37, or whether an interruption of the settlement took place. It is a fact that the yellow Painted Grey sand is replaced by grey natural soil. That speaks somewhat against a direct transition of these levels. In favour of it, however, would speak the continuous appearance of a potter's mark or symbol stamping in the form of Nandipada, not only in the Painted Grey Level but also in the level lying above it. In any case, the presence of Painted Grey and Black and Red Ware fragments ceases suddenly in Level 36. A new culture announces itself in a differently shaped common pottery and in finds like the grey terracotta head (fig. 22) or the bronze *triśūla* (fig. 23) described in the next chapter. Indeed, there is no definite way of dating, but the finds, specially the form of ceramics and the appearance of Northern Black Polish sherds, indicate the coming

of the Maurya Period. We definitely find ourselves in the pre-Maurya and early Maurya time of the 4th century B.C., for in the following Level 34 we do not only come across the same pottery sherds again (fig. 11), but meet the developed cultural objects of the Maurya time, as they are also known from other excavations, especially the famous *Mātrikā* terracottas with their slender faces (fig. 13). In the Maurya Levels 34 and 33 we also discovered the first coins, namely, silver punch-marked coins and un-inscribed cast coins with the crescent-on-hill motif on the obverse and the tree-in-railing motif on the reverse. There are no inscribed coins in these levels.

The next significant change in the objects found appears in Level 32. Some shapes of pottery continue but the common pottery is now characterised by long-necked types (fig. 12). Particularly conspicuous is the change in the style of the terracotta heads. As human figures the *Mātrikā* heads of the grey sort are prevailing almost exclusively. However, rather clear differences in fabrication and style are to be noted. For instance, only the faces of the Maurya figures were moulded, the ornamental bands were applied separately. The Śuṅga faces, however, including the hair decorations were pressed as a whole from the mould. The forms of style also changed: the Maurya faces are long, their eyes outlined as a simple ellipse, the mouth is thin and has no vertical risible folds on its corners, the hair is parted in the middle and a pearl-chain lies broadly over the forehead. A Śuṅga face (fig. 14) is much more round with broad cheeks, its eyes marked by a brow-line in addition to the simple ellipse. Near the mouth there is a clear vertical risible fold on either side, the hair is not parted in the middle but has, in most cases, a rectangular cut, the pearl-chain does not lie broadly over the forehead but falls down in a slope along the moulded decoration. The terracotta types of Level 32 and 31 stand clearly at the beginning of the Śuṅga terracotta development and are, therefore, to be classified as Early Śuṅga. Moulded plaques appear seldom at this time. There is not much change in the style of coins, for the punch-marked coins are still the most circulated currency. Crescent-on-hill types were no more found in these levels, but besides the silver punch-marked variety plenty of copper punch-marked coins were discovered now. The most significant coin-find was a small bowl with 42 such copper specimen. No inscribed coins were found as yet.

The excavation of Levels 30 and 29 was marked by the complete absence of single figures of *Mātrikās* found in previous layers. The field of domes-

tic art is now characterised by moulded terracotta plaques. Again, Mātrikā subjects are presented on them quite often, but the scenes have become more lively; secondary figures appear in increasing number. The style is clearly derived from the early Śuṅga types, but the form of the plaques requires new artistic solutions for the depiction of physical extremes and clothing. The ceramics have hardly changed in design nor have coins, as the silver and copper punch-marked specimen are still in circulation. It was only in the upper region of Level 29 that a single unusual die-struck copper coin with the Ujjain-symbols on the reverse and a standing human-figure-before-bull on the obverse (see Chapter 5, fig. 26) was found. Again there are no traces of inscribed coins. In spite of different alterations in the cultural objects, the dependence on the preceding period becomes clear. Levels 30 and 29 can, therefore, be dated as Middle-Śuṅga, i.e. in the second half of the 2nd century B.C.

At first sight, Level 28 appeared to offer little changes because the ceramics were almost the same and no alterations were actually to be registered in the building methods as revealed by the few remains of houses. Only the terracottas showed signs of an emancipation as if they wanted to establish an off-from-the-Śuṅga movement (cp. fig. 15). The beginning of a new era, however, became evident only after two special coins were found. These are the first inscribed coins from Sonkh. Their reading runs: *gomitasa*. The coins thus proved to be struck by King Gomitra, the ruler of Mathurā. These two specimen were discovered at completely different spots wide apart from each other, but on the same level. The clear succession of coins in the subsequent levels proved that the Gomitra coins are rightly ascribed to Level 28. According to the finds of Sonkh, Gomitra seems to have ruled for a very short time only; already in Level 27 Sūryamitra follows as the next of the Mitra kings. This Level 27 is the one with the first group of buildings mentioned in Chapter 3 as having been built of baked bricks. Not less than ten well legible Sūryamitra coins were found in the streets and houses of this most extensively excavated level and also in the lower phase of Level 26. The solidity and comfort of structures as well as the abundance of finds create the impression of a great prosperity; it seems that Sūryamitra had not only been the most lasting but also the most important of the Mitra kings. The succession of coins continues above the Sūryamitra region; four coins of Brahmamitra and one of Viṣṇumitra follow in the upper phase of Level 26 and in Level 25. Nowhere from Level 28 to 25 do coins occur in a medley. The conclusion

may, therefore, be drawn that, at the time of the Mitra kings, the circulating coins used to lose their validity with the death of the ruler.

The detection of the Mitra coins as described above is of an extraordinary importance for the assessment of historical events of that time in the whole of Northern India. It is worth while to place the results of the excavation in a wider context and to evaluate them from a higher point of view.

The sources used for publications on early Indian history are detailed lists of kings and dynasties from the different Purāṇas¹. Nothing much seems to be wrong with the reported number of years for the individual dynasties, i.e. 137 years for the Mauryas and 112 years for the Śuṅgas. Other rich sources for the Mauryan era help us to put its date safely between about 320 and 180 B.C. And thus the Śuṅga rule can be placed between 187/184 to 75/72 B.C. But, in contrast to the Mauryan history based on the Aśokan reports, it appears to be very difficult to fill the 112 years of Purāṇic Śuṅga history with historical life. It is not much that we learn about the time from other sources, viz. the Sūtras of Patañjali, the verses in Kālidāsa's Mālavikāgnimitra and Bāna's Harṣacharita, along with a few inscriptional references to the Śuṅgas. As a matter of fact, the Purāṇa list is not even fully correct, quoting 120 years for the kings who, in its colophon, are reported to have ruled altogether 112 years. The Śuṅga period is, therefore, somewhat dark for the historians who have to follow a given date, even if they cannot vouch for it. The main question which obtrudes upon us is: did the Śuṅgas really control an empire comparable to that of the Mauryans, or did Northern India comprise numerous local states ruled by their vassals? On this problem there is a wide difference of opinion. Above all, the numismatists with their datings of local coins raise considerable doubt. The catalogues of coins of ancient India enumerate a large variety of coins with names of rulers, most of them ending in -mitra and -datta, from different states in North India, as for instance Almorā, Ayodhya, Kauśāmbi and, of course, Mathurā. It is obvious that the dating of those coins is of special importance for the answer to our question. The standard work and most reliable catalogue in this respect is undoubtedly John Allan's "Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India" in the British Museum. His datings have been accepted

1. The main texts are Matsya-, Vāyu- and Brahmanāṇḍa-Purāṇa. For the different versions cp. F.E. Pargiter, *The Purāṇa Text of the Dynasties of the Kāli Age*, Varanasi (Reprint 1962), pp. 36 ff.

widely and used for historical observations. But as Allan dated the inscribed coins of several local states of Northern India in the 2nd century B.C. and one by Gomitra I, as the first of the Mathurā Mitras, even at the end of the 3rd century B.C., a considerable confusion has confounded our understanding of history. It is reflected in the publications and it may be useful to note the effects on a comparative diagram (fig. 16) ¹. Showing a selection only, it contains but all the different opinions on the problem. As one can see, there is an opposition to Allan's datings on the part of Sircar and Verma. Most disturbing is the fact that none of them gives reasons for his dating. However, even without the help of archaeological data, one point should be clearly stated: whoever places the Mitra coins in the Śuṅga period as Allan, Rapson (CHI) and Gupta have done, must face and explain the fact why not a single inscribed coin of the Purāṇic Śuṅga from the same time is known to us². That only the vassals of local rulers issued coins in their name and neither Puśyāmītra nor his successors in the Purāṇic list, seems quite improbable.

The significance of the archaeological sequence of coins in the mound of Sonkh should be clear against the background of this knowledge. In Levels 34 to 29, i.e., during the whole Maurya era till the second half of the Purāṇic Śuṅga period, silver punch-marked coins, uninscribed cast coins, copper punch-marked coins and die-struck coins came to light. Considering all the evidence of excavation and finds, Level 29 must have extended to the last quarter of the 2nd century, i.e. near about 120 B.C. After that, the first inscribed coins appear, namely, those of Gomitra and the Mitra rulers following him. In the light of this result, the local State of Mathurā seems to have been founded at the end of the 2nd century B.C.

1. Smith, V. A. : Coins of Ancient India, Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, vol. I, Delhi-Varanasi, Reprint 1972; p. 190 f.
- Allan, John : Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India, London 1936.
- CHI : Cambridge History of India, ed. by E.J. Rapson, vol. I, Delhi, 3rd Reprint 1968; p. 474.
- Sircar, D.C. in : The Age of Imperial Unity. History and Culture of the Indian People, vol. II, Bombay 1953, p. 171.
- Gupta, P.L. : The Coinage of the Local Kings of Northern India and the Date of Kaniṣka. In: Papers on the Date of Kaniṣka, Leiden 1968, p. 114-120.
- Verma, T.P. : Palaeography of Local Coins of Northern India. In: Seminar Papers on the Local Coins of Northern India, Varanasi 1968, p. 137-143. (A very important paper).
2. Cp. Prasad, H.K. : Did the Śuṅgas issue Coins? In: INSI, vol. XVII, 1955, p. 24-36.

SOME RESULTS OF THE EXCAVATIONS AT SONKH

We hope the succession of coins in other local states of Northern India can also be established archaeologically. It is, of course, quite possible that one or the other state may have been founded somewhat earlier; the disintegration of the Śuṅga Kingdom, however, began most probably in the last third of the 2nd century B.C. This would also explain why no inscribed coin of the Imperial Śuṅgas can be found: the early Śuṅgas issued punch-marked and die-struck coins, they did not yet know the process of minting inscribed coins. These came, in fact, first into use in the local states.

Independent of these considerations, the findings of Sonkh confirm the sequence of the Mitra kings in the following order: Gomitra, Sūryamitra, Brahmamitra, and Viṣṇumitra. However, Dr̥ḍhamitra, included in Allan's Catalogue besides Goṣadatta (to be eliminated) and like him proved by a single piece of evidence only, is not found at Sonkh.

The placing of Gomitra into a phase subsequent to the middle Śuṅga period of the Purāṇa-lists can hardly be doubted. It is more difficult to determine the length of the rule for the following Mitra kings. But it would be unrealistic and incompatible with all excavation experience to assume a substantially longer period than 20 years for the individual levels. The data of the synopsis (fig. 10) are, therefore, to be taken with a grain of salt; nevertheless, a shift to either side of more than two or three decades seems to be quite improbable. Moreover, the group of the Mitra levels is embedded in an uninterrupted sequence of building activities. In fact, no more Mitra coins appeared in Level 24 where, on the contrary, two coins of the Kṣatrapa Hagāmaśa and one of Rāmadatta were found side by side. Immediately above, in Level 23, about twenty further Kṣatrapa coins were unearthed within the houses and on the roads. Some of them are Mathurā issues of Rajūvula; the bulk hails from Śoḍāsa. Besides, within the same level Rāmadatta coinages were found again. It seems as if the rule of the Kṣatrapas overlapped the reign of Rāmadatta. Noteworthy is that only Rāmadatta coins were detected and none of the other numerous -dattas. The outcome of the Sonkh excavation raises the question, whether the dynasty of the Dattas can be taken as a continuous one with fifteen rulers in succession. May it not have been that most of the Dattas ruled concurrently in small subdistricts of Mathurā and that the period of their reign extended over a few decades only? It would be interesting to know, which Datta coins were found in other parts of the Mathurā district. D. C. Sircar's

dating of the Dattas subsequent to that of the Kṣatrapas, i.e. into the Kuṣāṇa-time could not be confirmed at Sonkh contrary to his quite acceptable date for the Mitras.

The occurrence of an element of a different culture within Level 23 has already been observed in Chapter 3 dealing with the building activity. In this level, for instance, the roof construction and the lay-out of the houses underwent changes. The shape of pottery as found in Levels 26 and 25 (fig. 17) was replaced by new types of earthenware. Yet it cannot be overlooked that along with the independent ceramics of Level 23 (fig. 18) the first examples and elements of stamped Kuṣāṇa pottery appear. With its applied Svastika- and Nandyāvarta- patterns being perhaps the Rāmadatta element, the special ware of Level 23 acts as link between the ceramics of the Mitra-time and the Kuṣāṇa pottery.

Among the finds, the numerous figures of a particular type of mother-goddesses, described in Chapter 5 (fig. 31), attracted our attention. No single figure representing Kubera, Skanda or Durgā had so far been found; this appeared all the more astonishing as in Level 22 the cult of these gods was quite common. In this connection a seal-impression may be mentioned bearing the name Anaṅgabala in two scripts, i.e. in Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī, which throws light on the eclectic nature of that culture (see Chapter 5, fig. 32).

Naturally, for the Kṣatrapa-levels again no absolute date can be given. But there is no doubt that the reign of the Kṣatrapas follows the rule of the last Mitras. The sequence of levels requires for Hagāmaśa a date in the end of the first century B.C. Even without any attempt at dating Rajūvula and Śoḍāsa, it is evident that at Sonkh their reign reaches into the early decades of the Christian era.

Transition from the Kṣatrapas to the Kuṣāṇas

The excavators were fully aware how important it would be to observe the transition from the Kṣatrapas to the later levels. In many places they investigated again and again whether there was any sign of an interval indicating a temporary absence of colonisation. All the results did, however, point in the opposite direction: the mound of Sonkh was built upon continuously and hence also during the phase in question. The interlocking and re-use of old walls as seen everywhere in Sonkh and the well-preserved foundation walls do not allow any other conclusion but that

SONKH

TACOMETIC PLAN DES ARRELS NO 2000
ARRELS NO 2000
MUSÉE 1 1900

1000

Fig. 2: Tachymeter-Map of Sonkh Mound

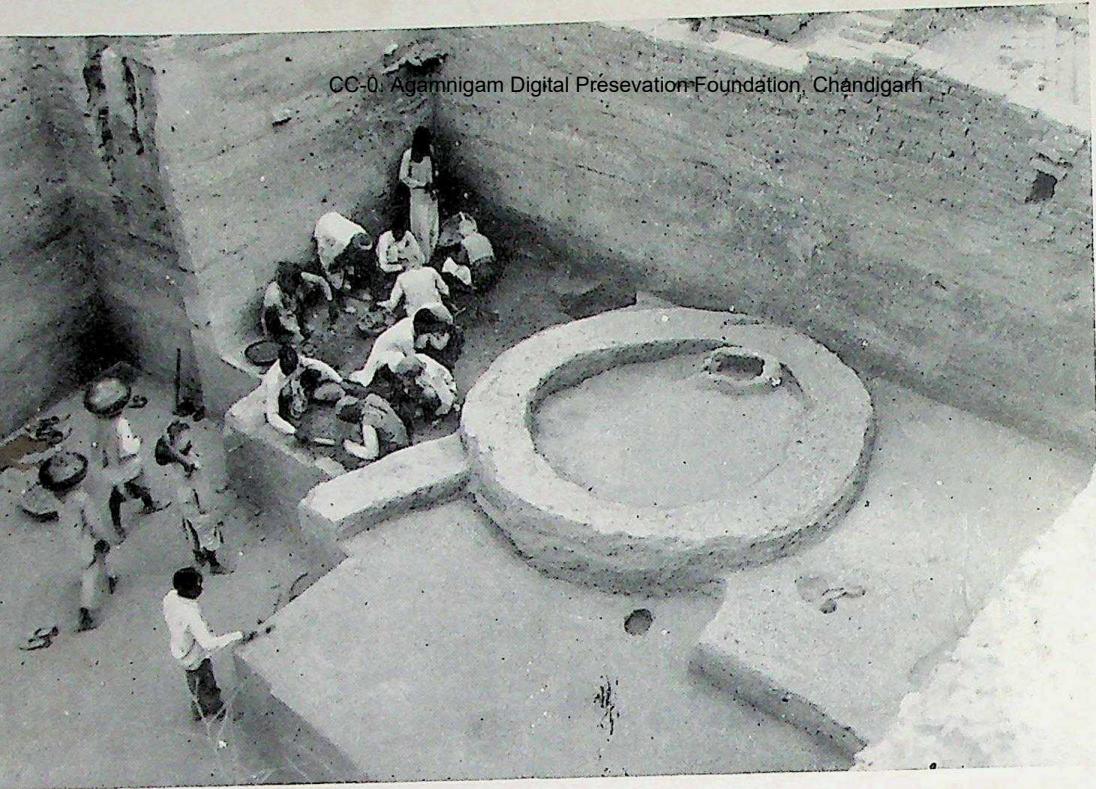


Fig. 3: Circular mud-house in Maurya Level 35

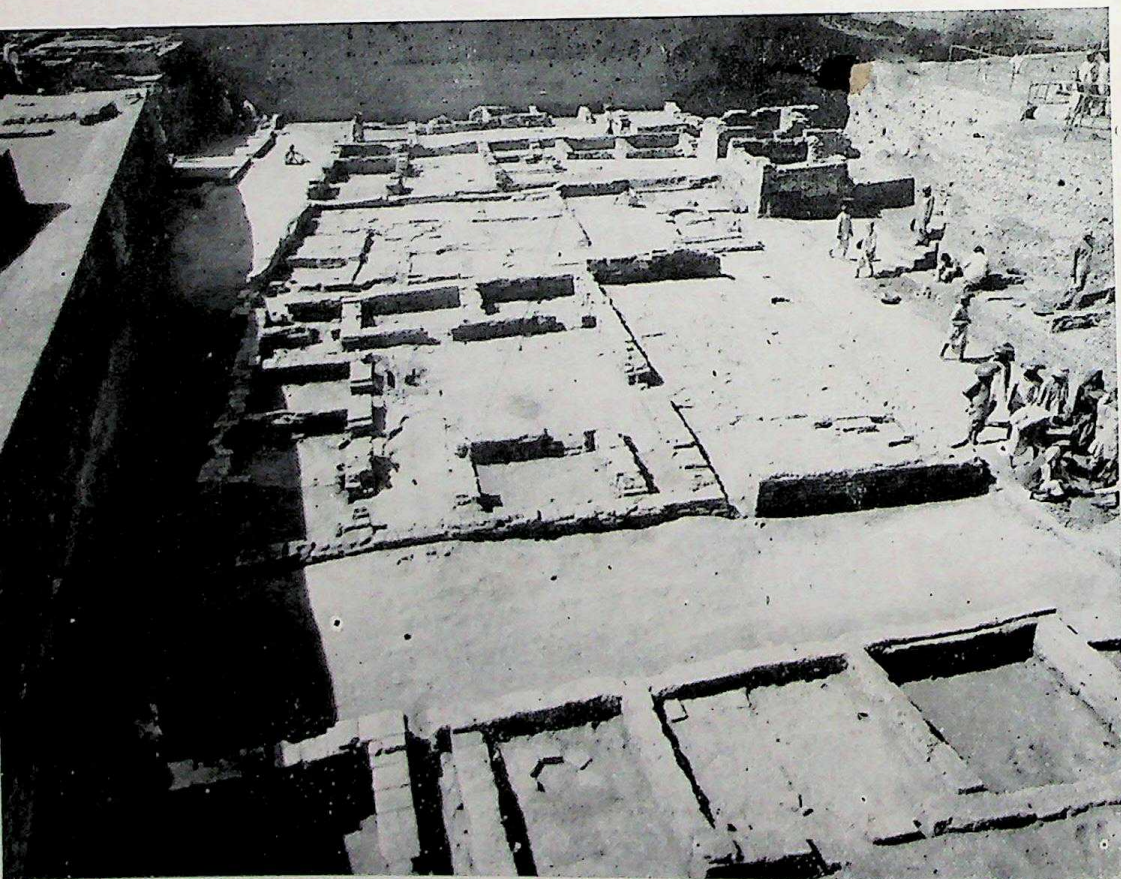


Fig. 4: Excavated area of Level 27

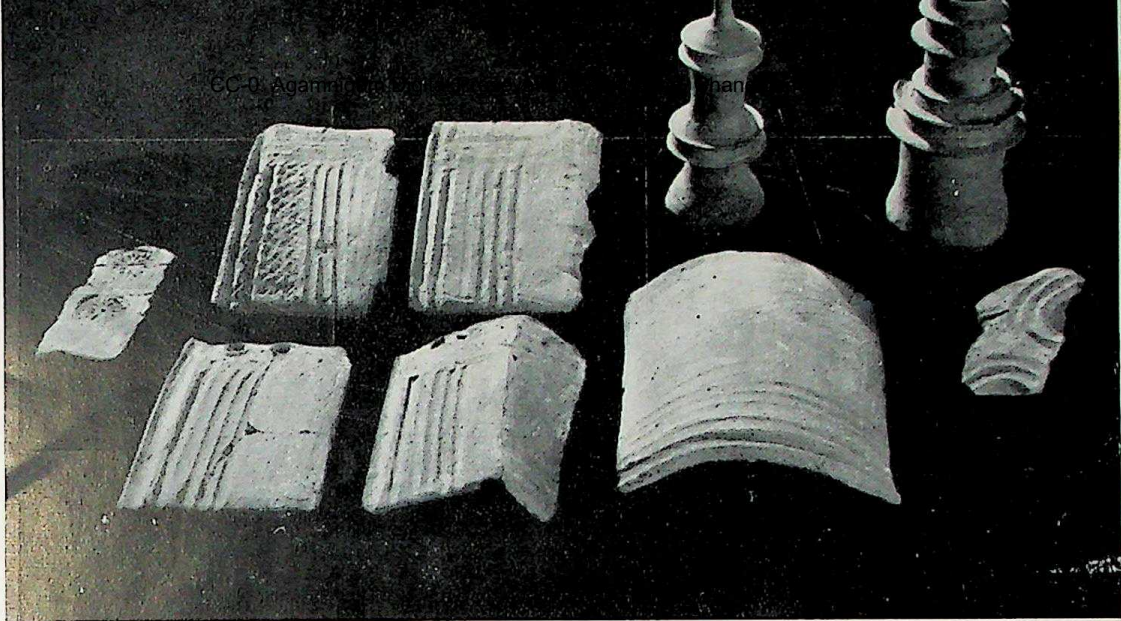


Fig. 6: Selection of roof tiles and pinnacles from Level 27

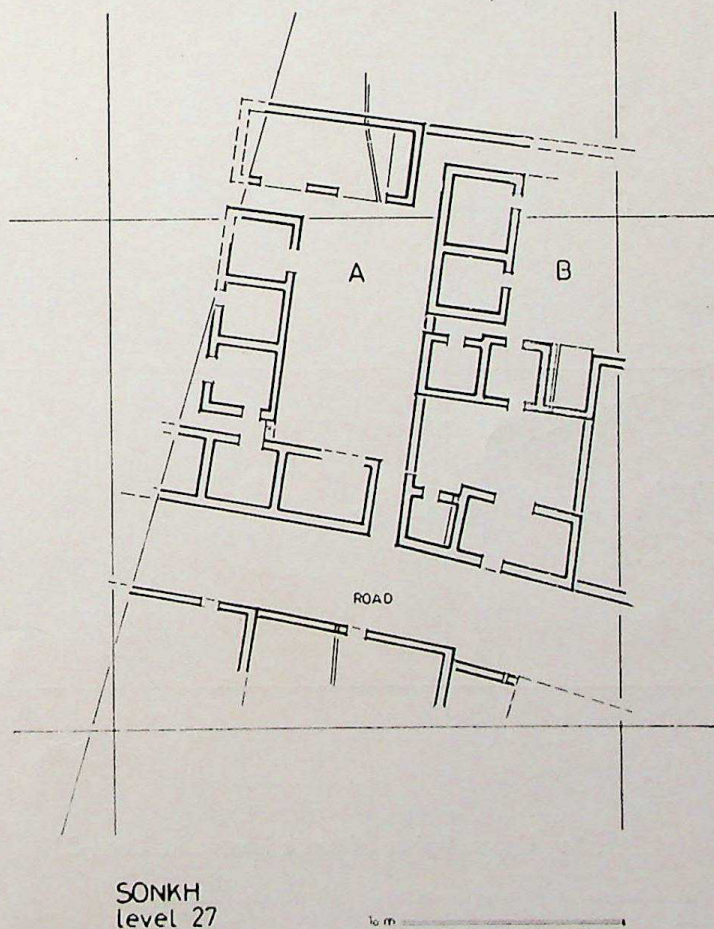


Fig. 5: Ground-plan of two houses in Level 27

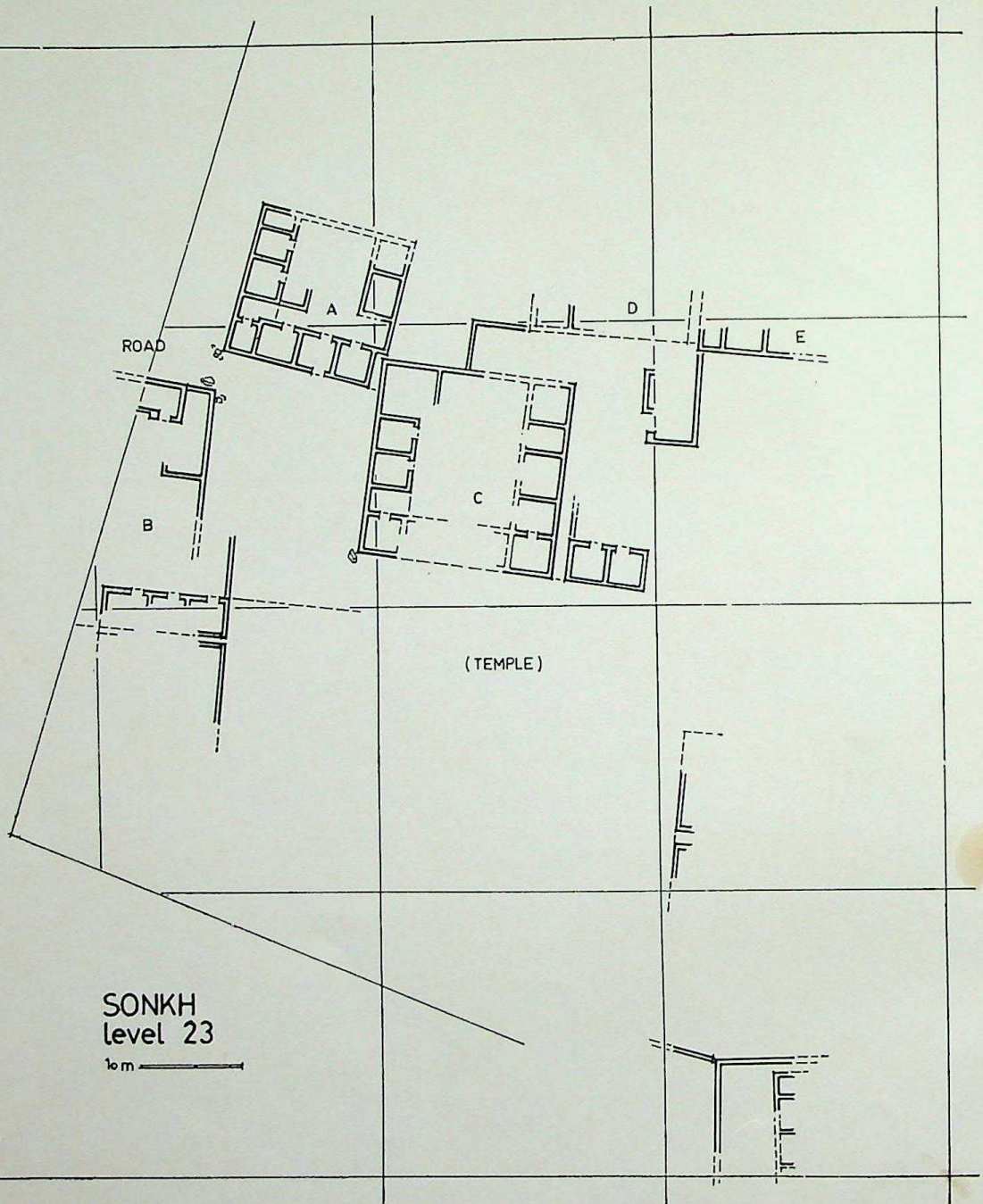


Fig. 7: Ground-plan of some houses in Level 23

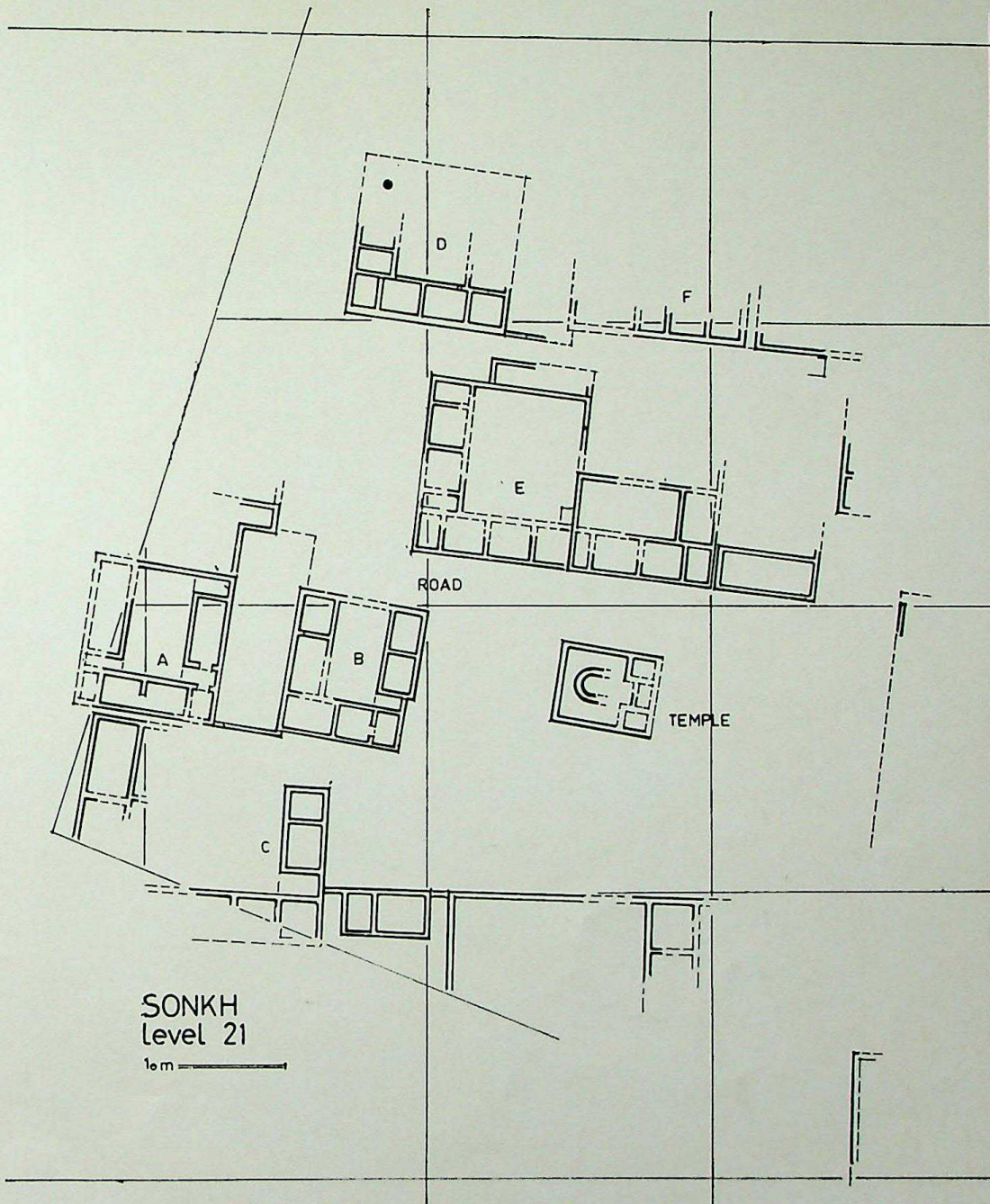


Fig. 8: Ground-plan of structures in the southern excavation area

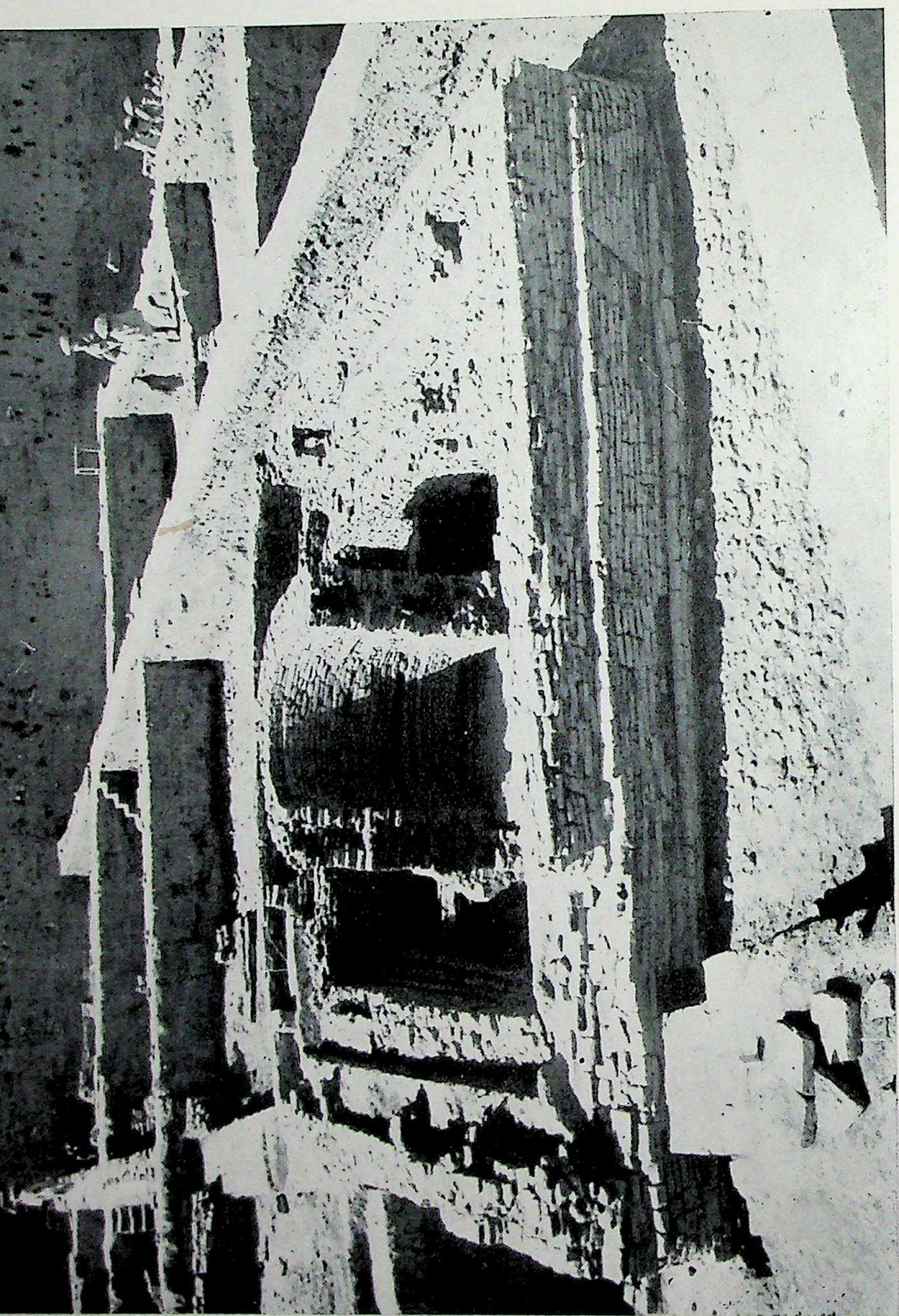


Fig. 9: Apsidal Temple No. 1 in the centre of Kuṣāṇa habitations

1		CC-0. Agamnigam Digital Presevation Foundation, Chandigarh
-		3. CENT. - 19. CENT. A.D.
15		
16		VĀSUDEVA + KANIṢKA III
17		
18	}	
19		HUVIṢKA
20		
21		KANIṢKA
22		WIMA KADPHISES + KANIṢKA
23	}	
24		KṢATRAPAS + RĀMADATTA
25		~50-20 BRAHMA; VIṢṆUMITRA
26		~80-50 SŪRYAMITRA
27		~100 GOMITRA
28		
29	}	MIDDLE ŚUNGA
30		
31	}	EARLY ŚUNGA
32		
33	}	MAURYA
34		
35	}	PRE - + EARLY MAURYA
36		
37	}	
38		PAINTED GREY WARE
39		BLACK AND RED WARE
40		CHARCOAL DATE MIDDLE LEVEL ~600 B.C.

Fig. 10: Synopsis of the succession of levels in the Mound of Sonkh

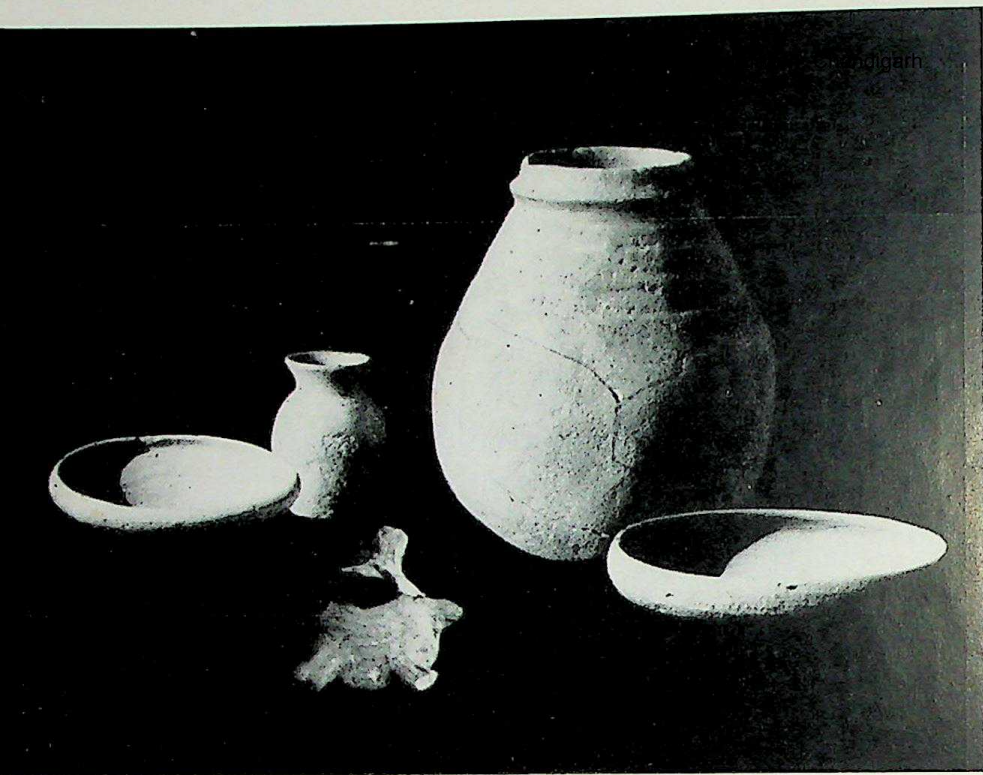


Fig. 11: Selection of common pottery from the Mauryan levels

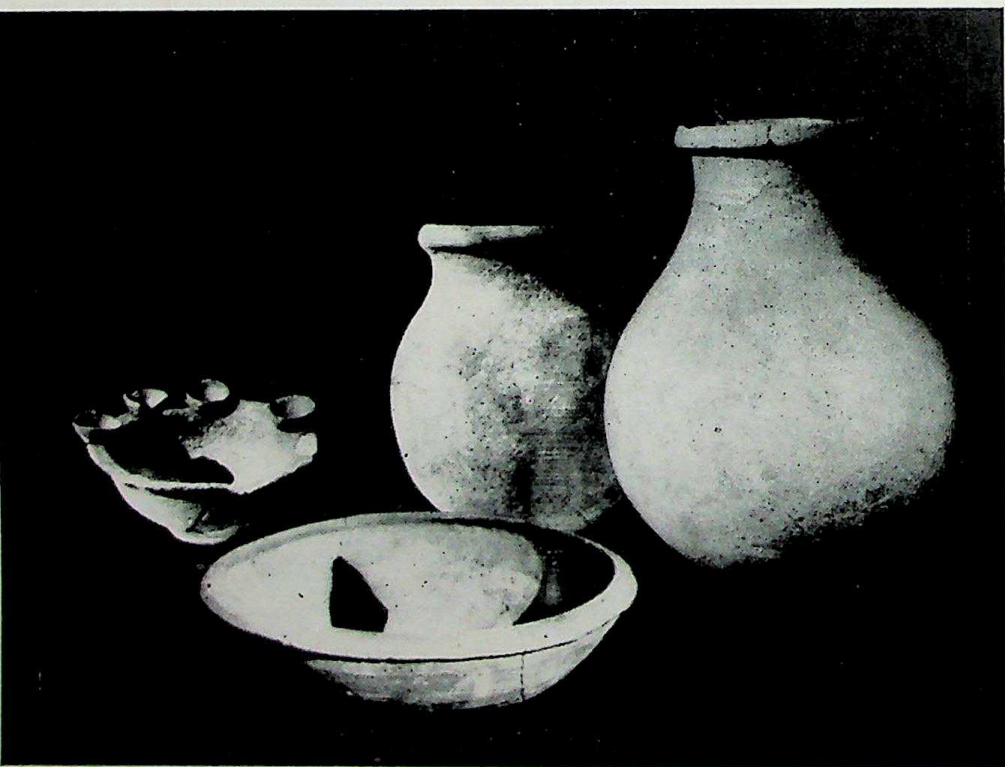


Fig. 12: Group of pottery from the Śunga levels



Fig. 13: Terracotta head of a Mātrikā figure. Maurya period



Fig. 15: Terracotta plaque representing a standing female figure. Levels 28-27



Fig. 14: Terracotta head of a Mātrikā figure. Śuṅga period

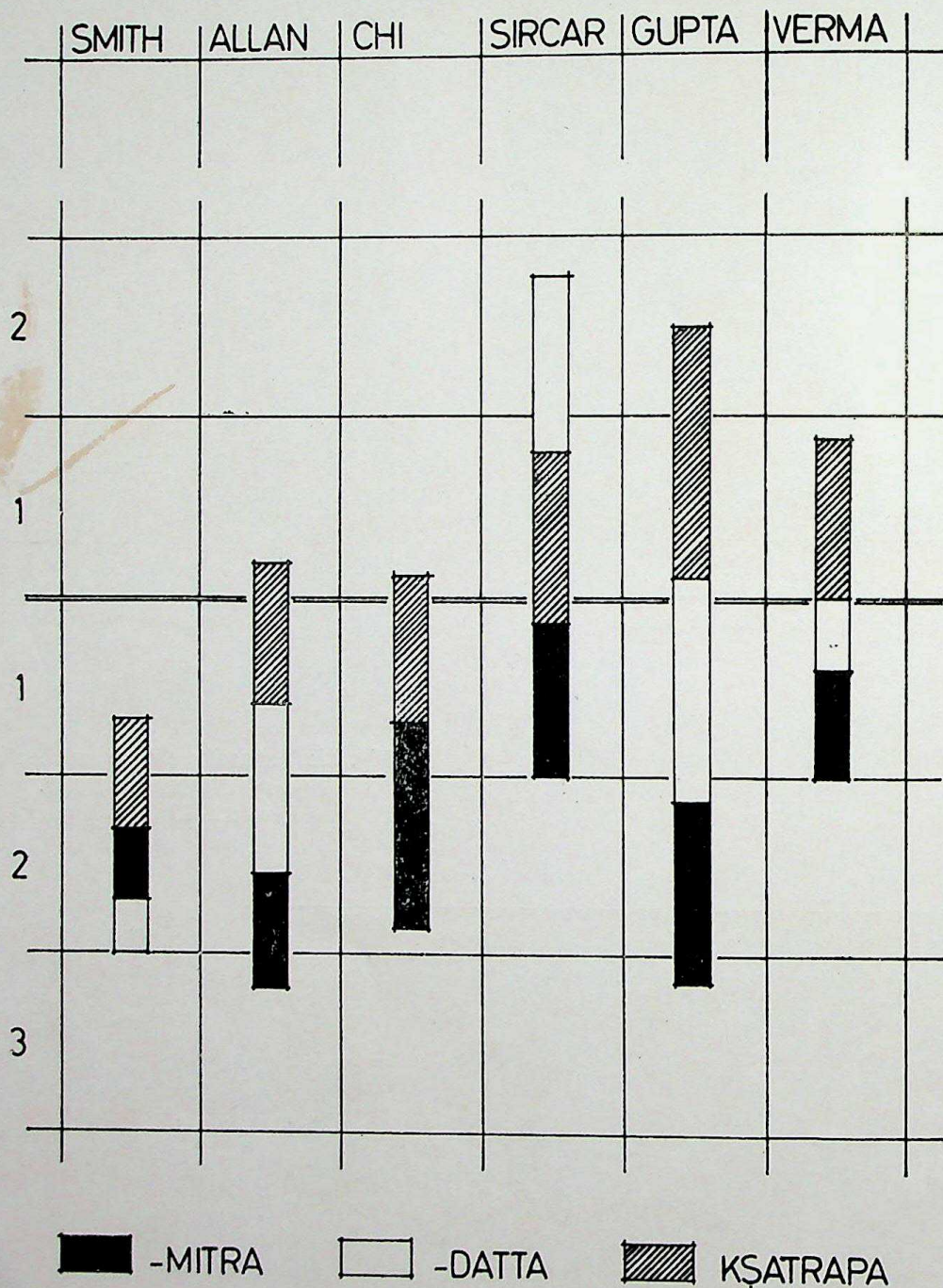


Fig. 16: Diagram of dating conceptions from different publications



Fig. 17: Group of pottery from Level 26



Fig. 18: Group of pottery from Level 23

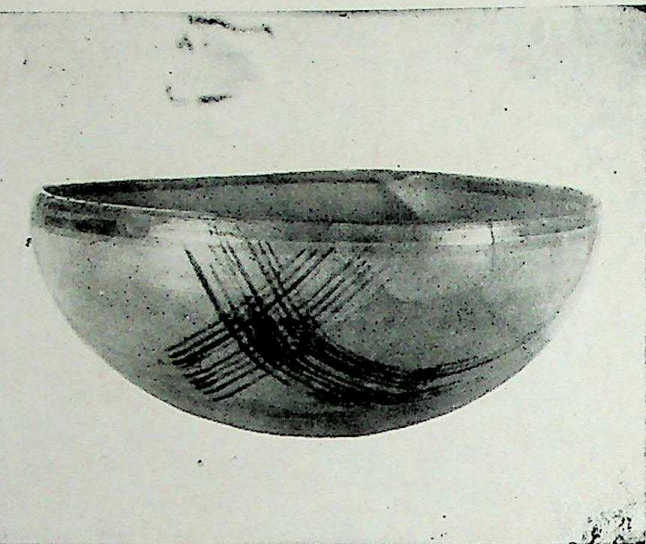


Fig. 19: Bowl of Painted Grey Ware

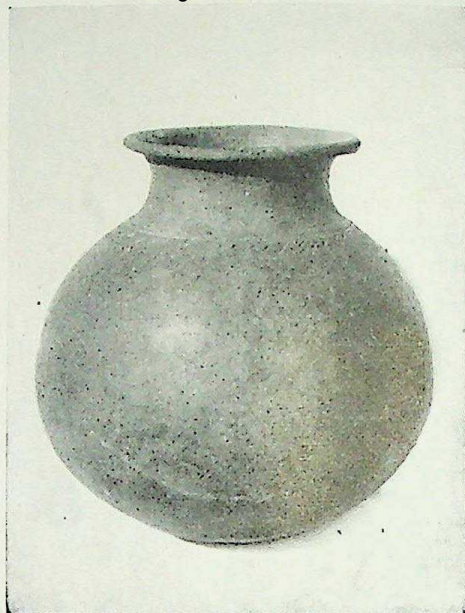


Fig. 21: Water vessel from Painted Grey Ware level

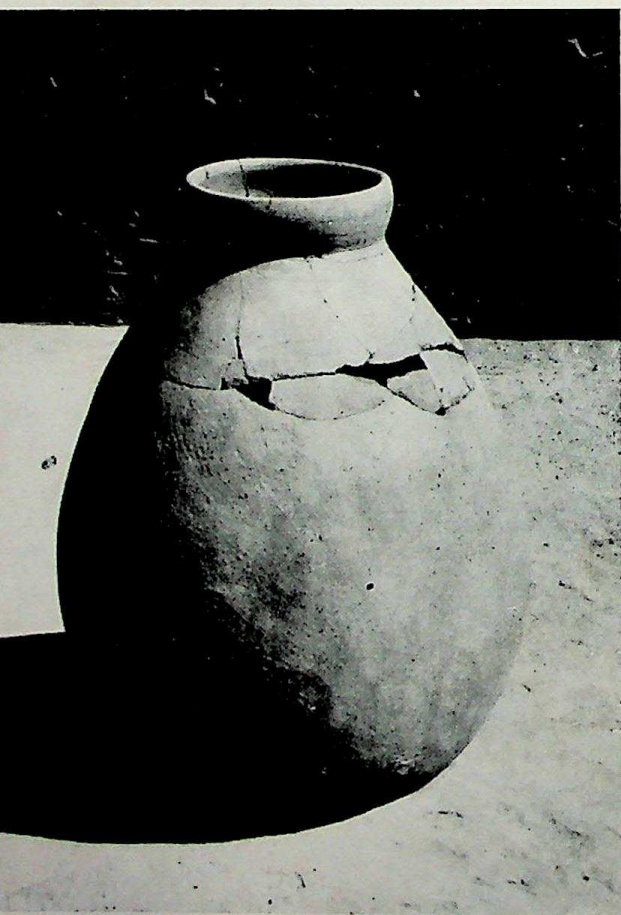


Fig. 20: Big water jar from Painted Grey Ware level

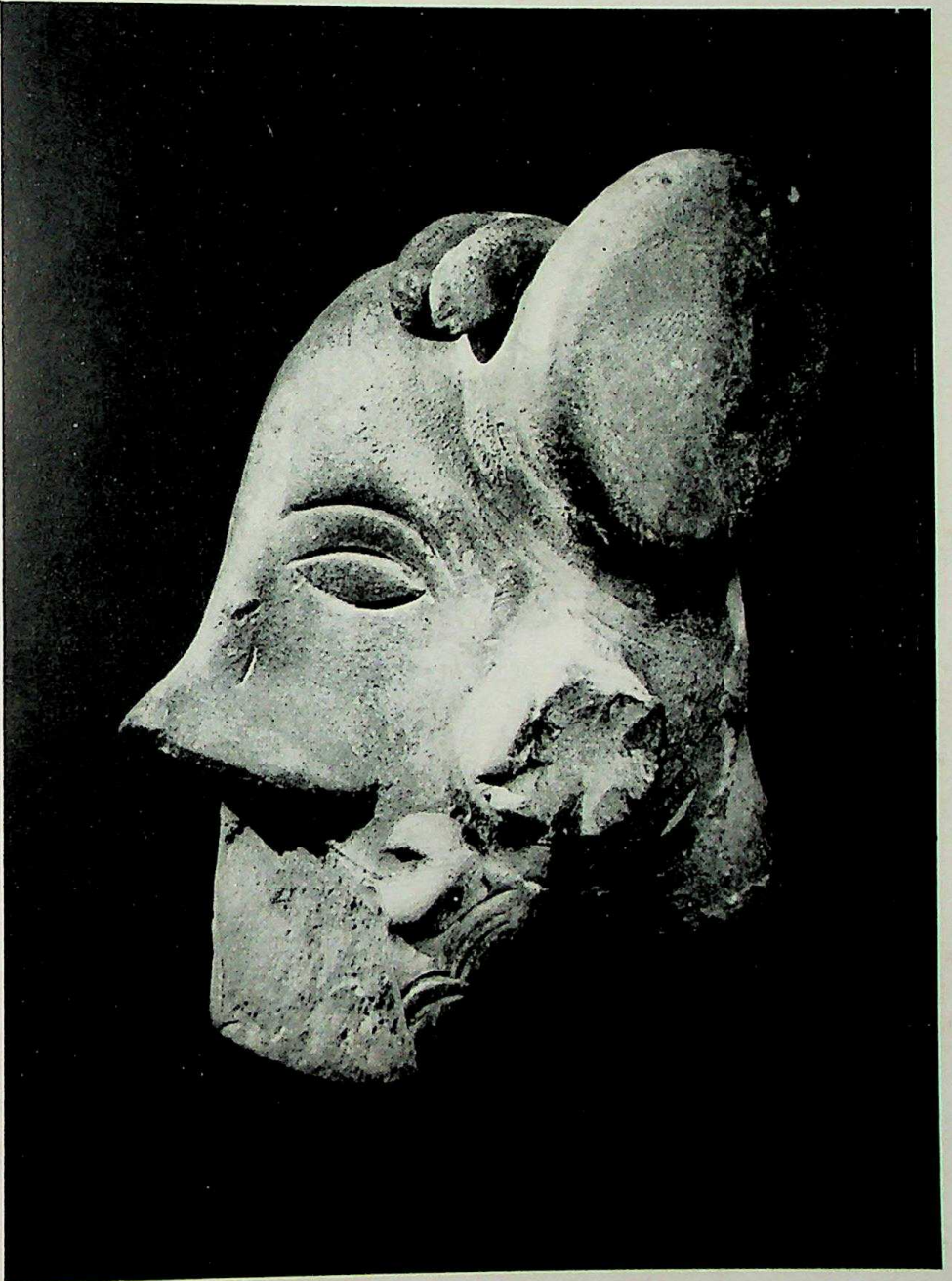


Fig. 22: Male terracotta head. Pre- to early Maurya period

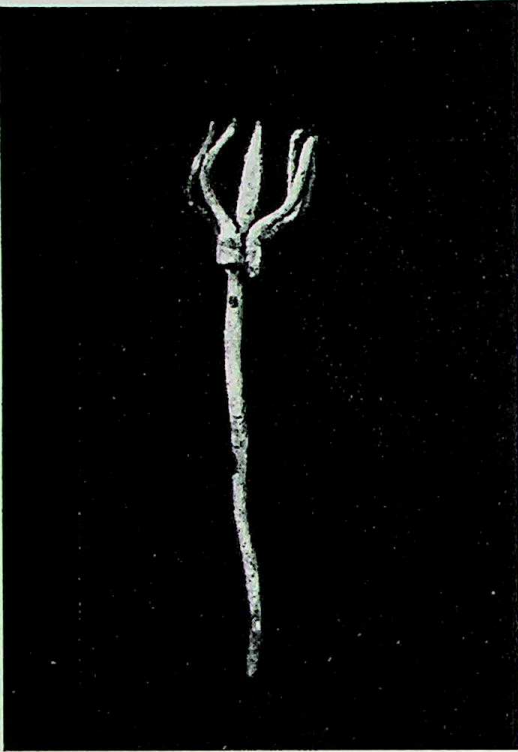


Fig. 23: Copper trisula from early Maurya period

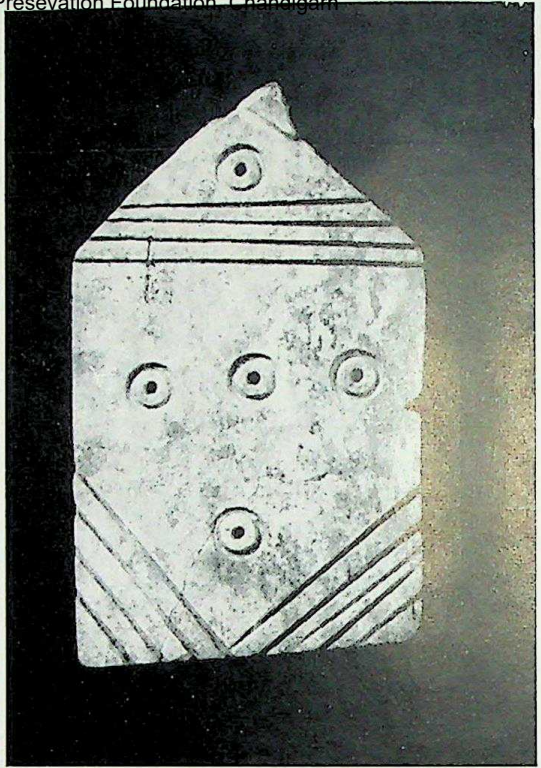


Fig. 24: Plaque of bone, representing lower part of human body

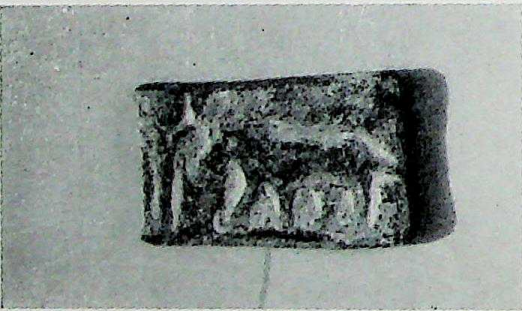


Fig. 25: Oblong-shaped copper coin from Level 33

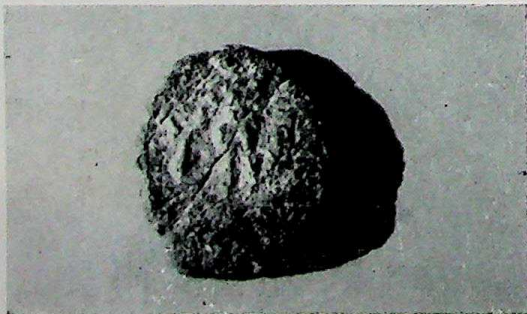


Fig. 26: Die-struck copper coin from Level 29

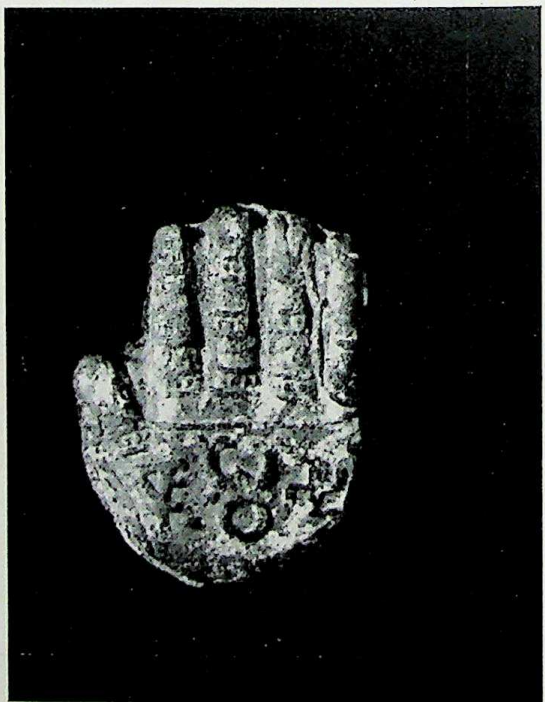


Fig. 27: Amulet in the shape of a hand. Terracotta from Level 27

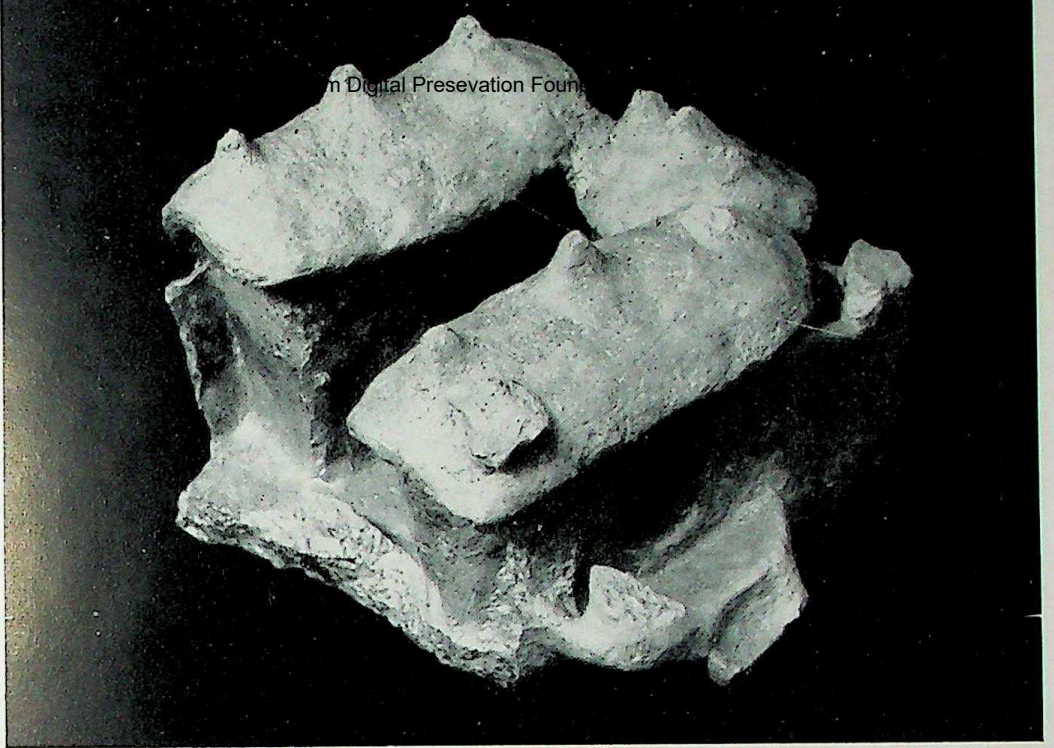


Fig. 28: Votive-tank in the shape of four houses

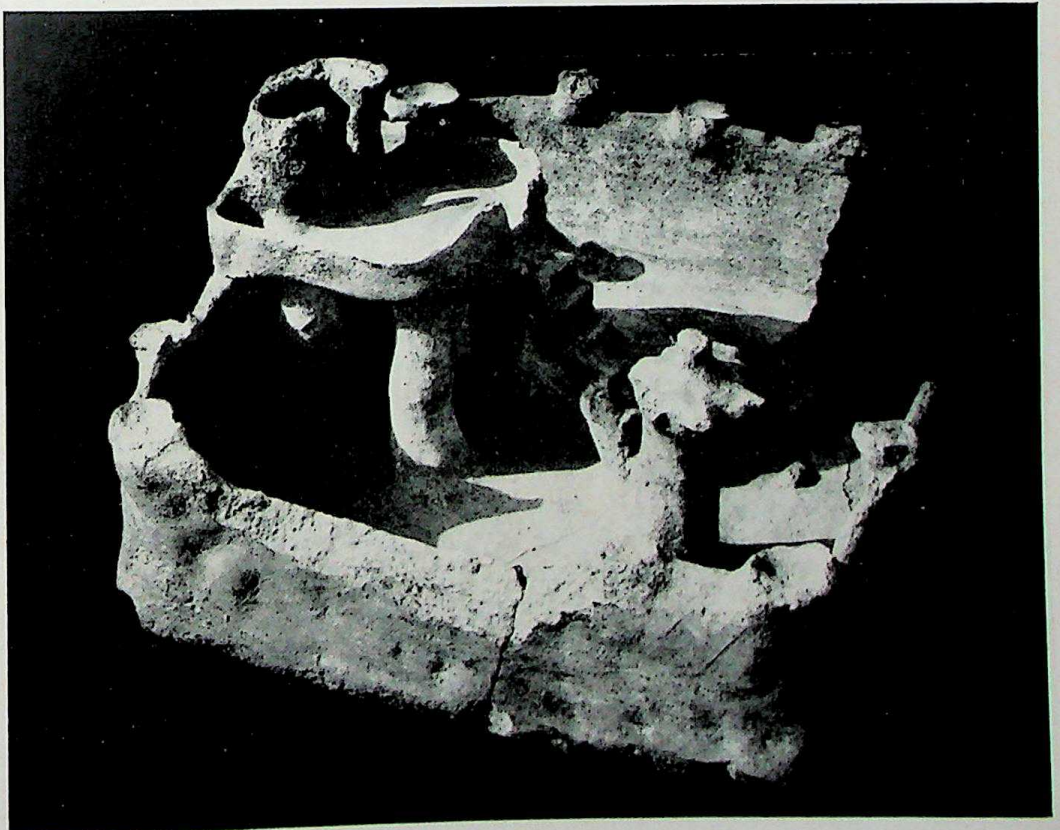


Fig. 29: Votive-water-tank with an elevated temple platform

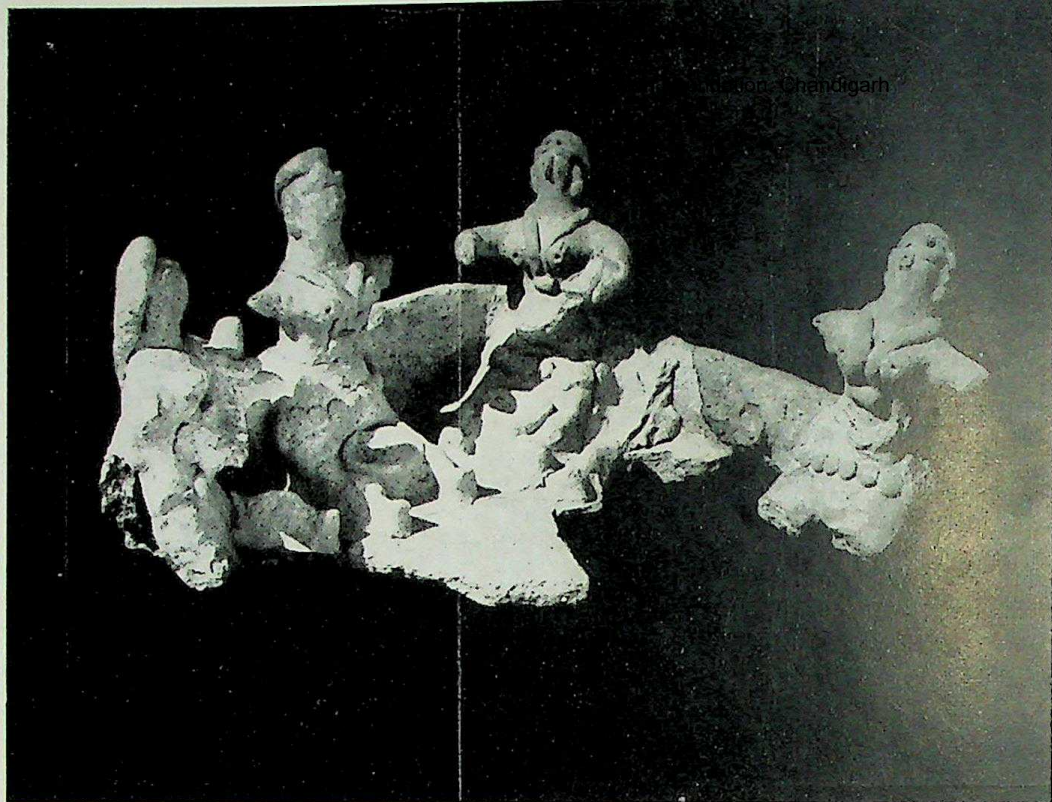


Fig. 30: Votive-tank with remains of four seated Mātrikā figures



Fig. 31: Seated Mātrikā with child. Level 23



Fig. 32: Seal impression with Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī script

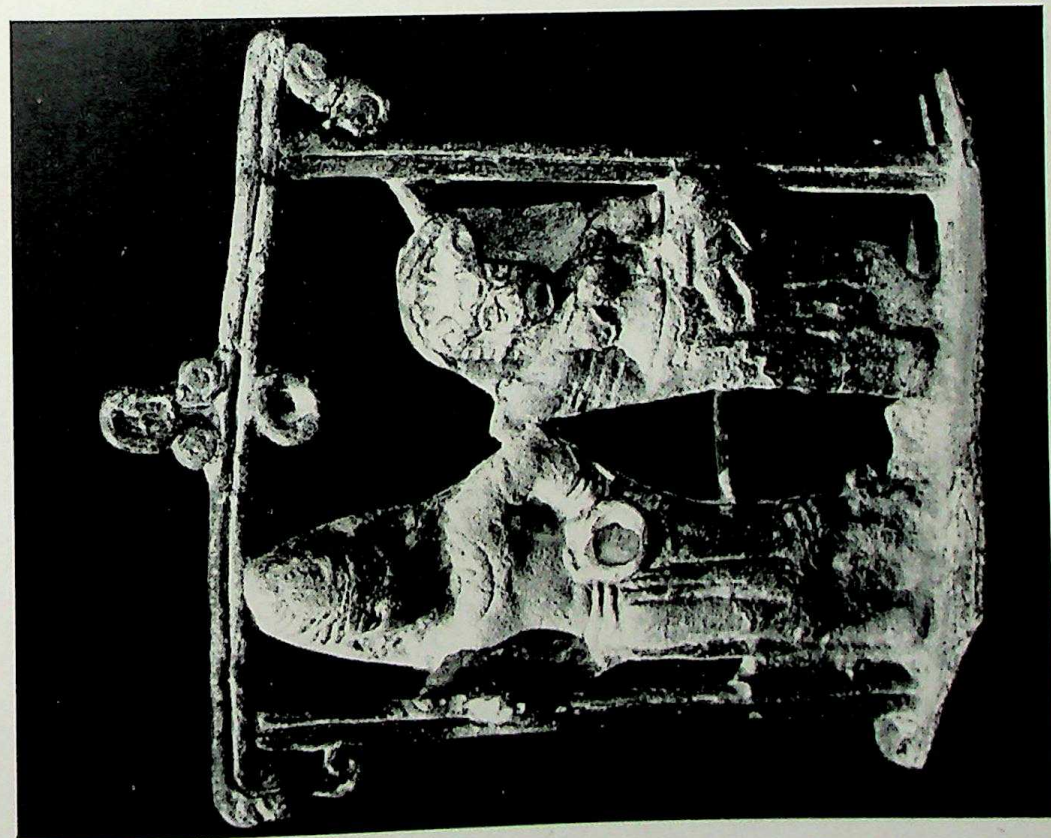


Fig. 33: Two-figured bronze from Kuṣāṇa level

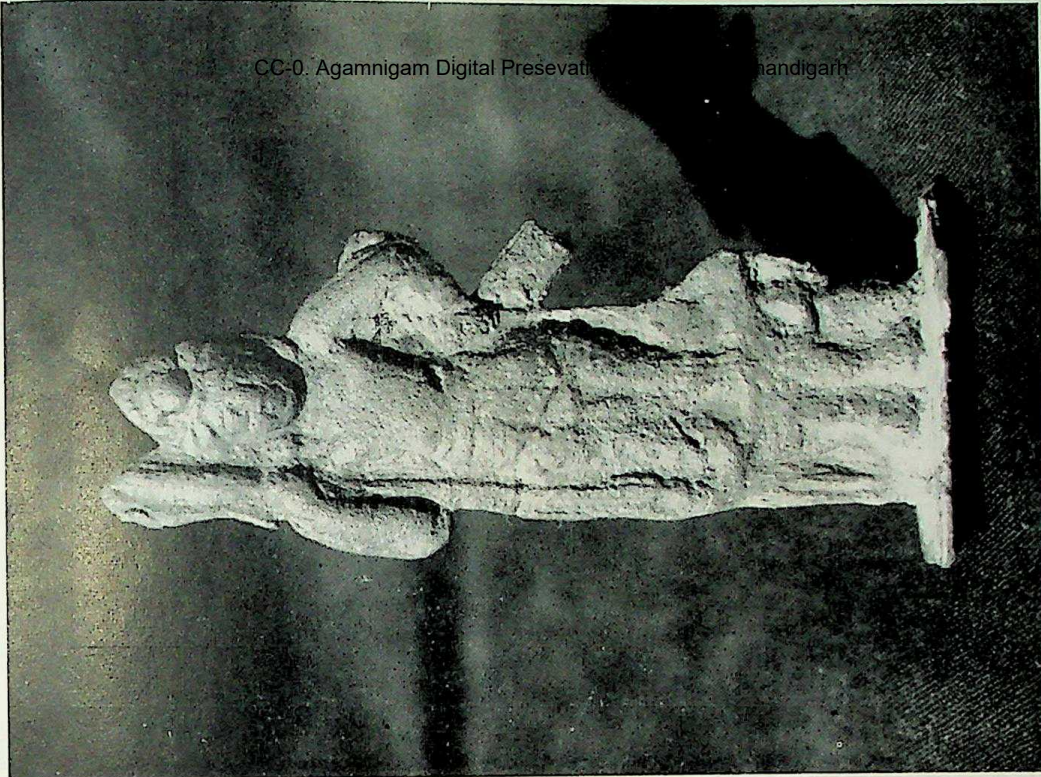


Fig. 34: Bronze figure of a male with spear (Skanda type)



Fig. 35: Hollow plaque with the depiction of musicians. A rattle from Level 21



Fig. 36: Terracotta plaque of Durgā Mahiṣāsura-mardini. Level 16

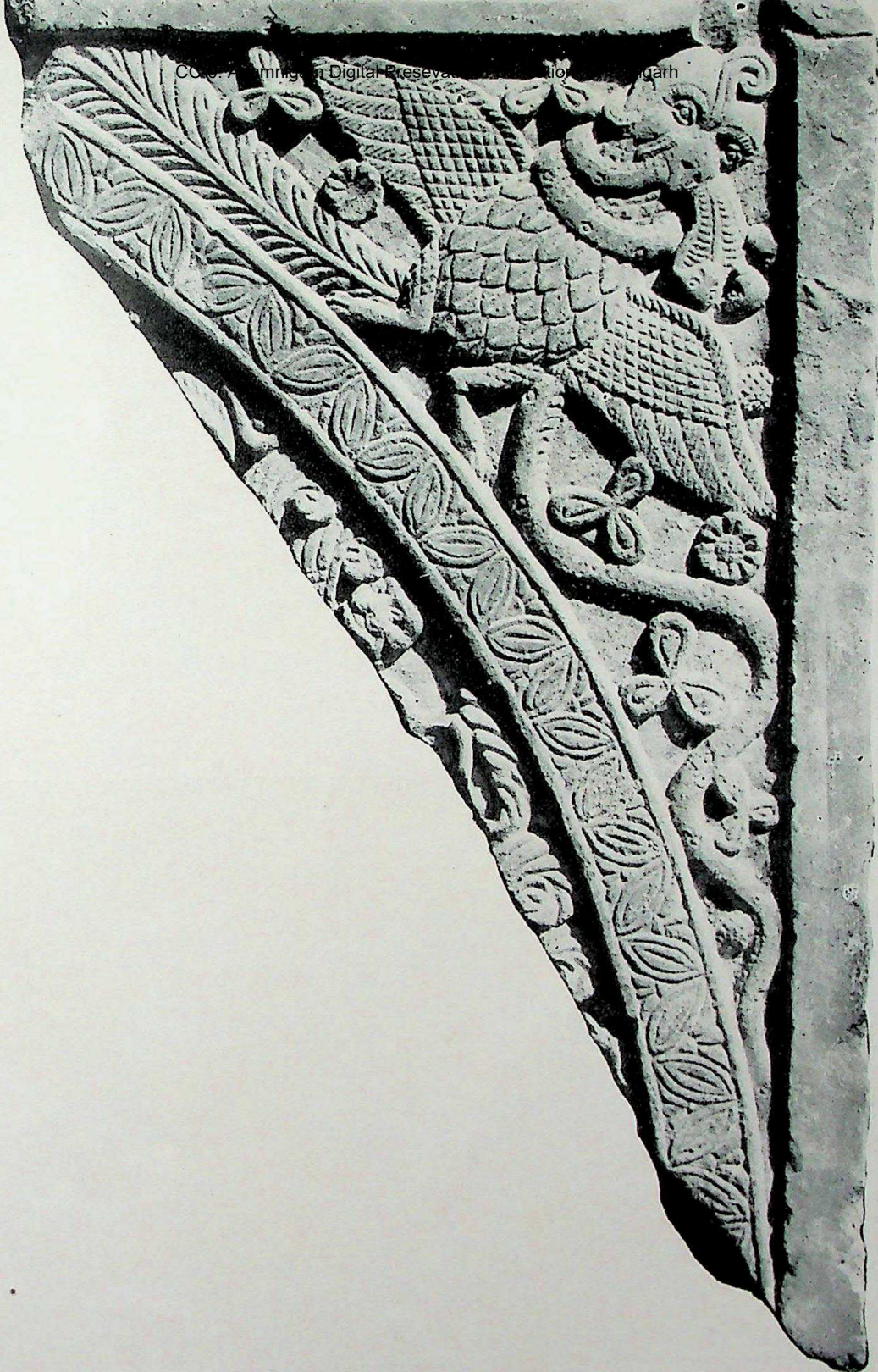


Fig. 37: Fragment of a tympanum with the representation of a Garuḍa with snake. Kuṣāṇa period

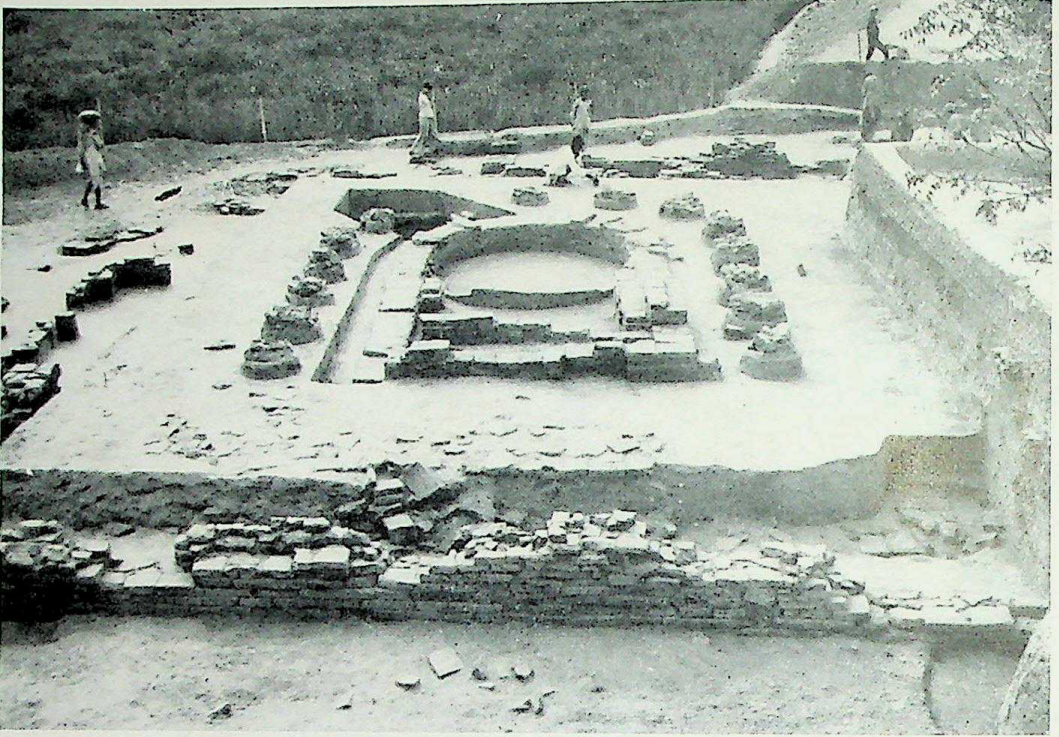


Fig. 38: Structural remains of the upper phase of Apsidal Temple No. 2 at Sonkh

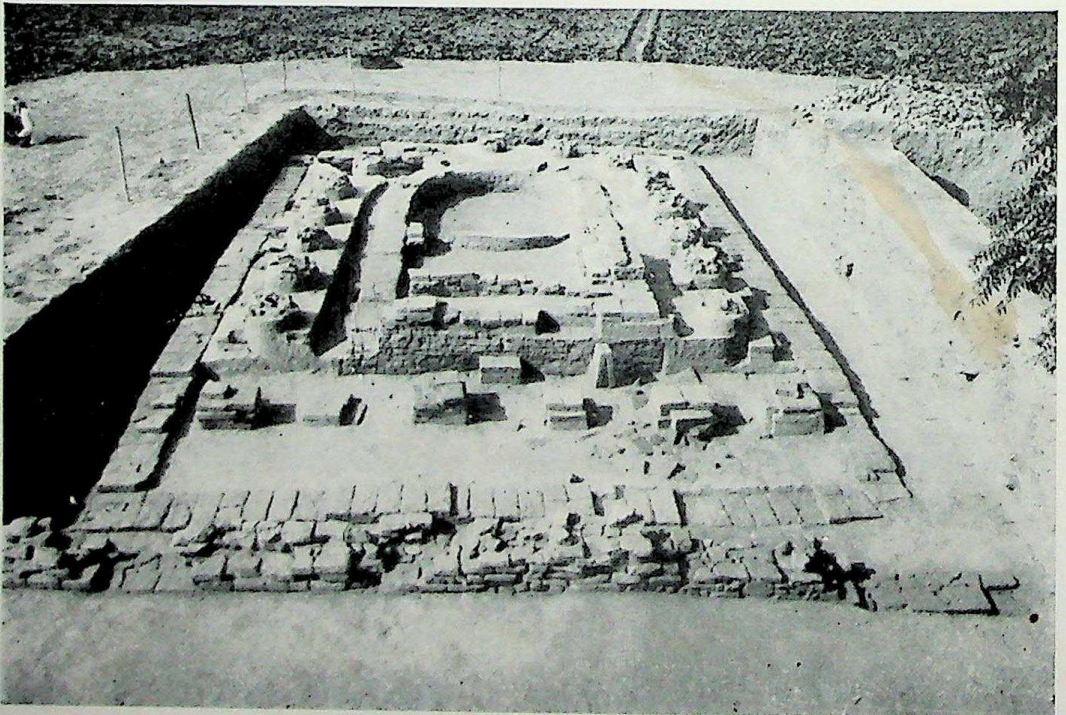


Fig. 39: Structural remains of the lower plus upper phase of Apsidal Temple No. 2 at Sonkh

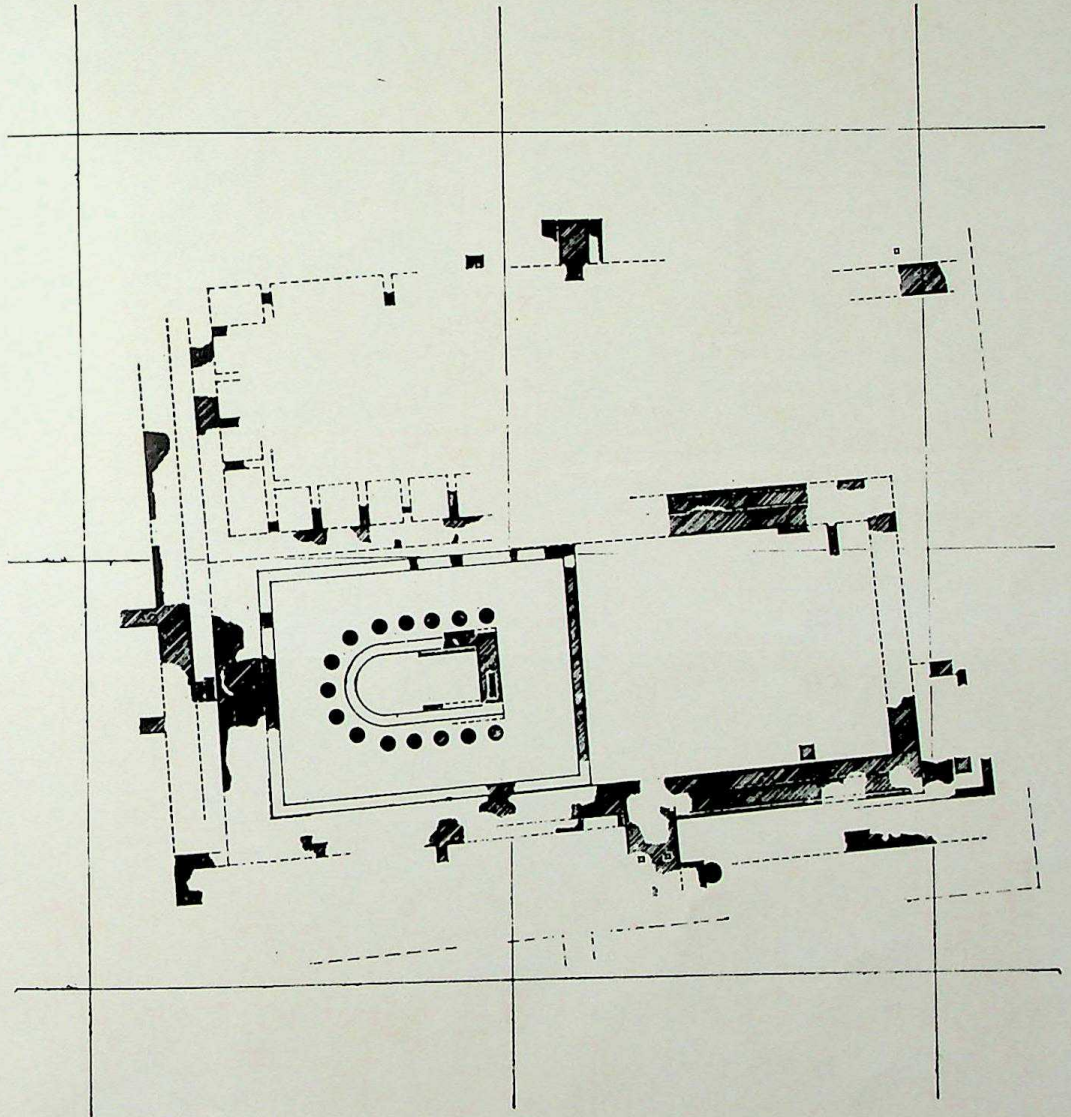


Fig. 40: Ground-plan of the upper phase structures of Apsidal Temple No. 2 at Sonkh



Fig. 41: Fragment of a Hollow terracotta Nāga head.
Upper phase; Kaniṣka period



Fig. 42: Nāga with book. Fragment of
stone relief, Mathurā sandstone.
Upper phase; Kaniṣka period



Fig. 45: Terracotta mould and its reproduction, taken from the group of
children in the relief in fig. 44. Kaniṣka period



Fig. 43: Western end of bottom lintel of the southern gate. Makara with Nāga. Upper phase; Kaniška period



Fig. 44: Bottom lintel with Nāga panel. Mathurā sandstone. Upper phase; Kaniška period

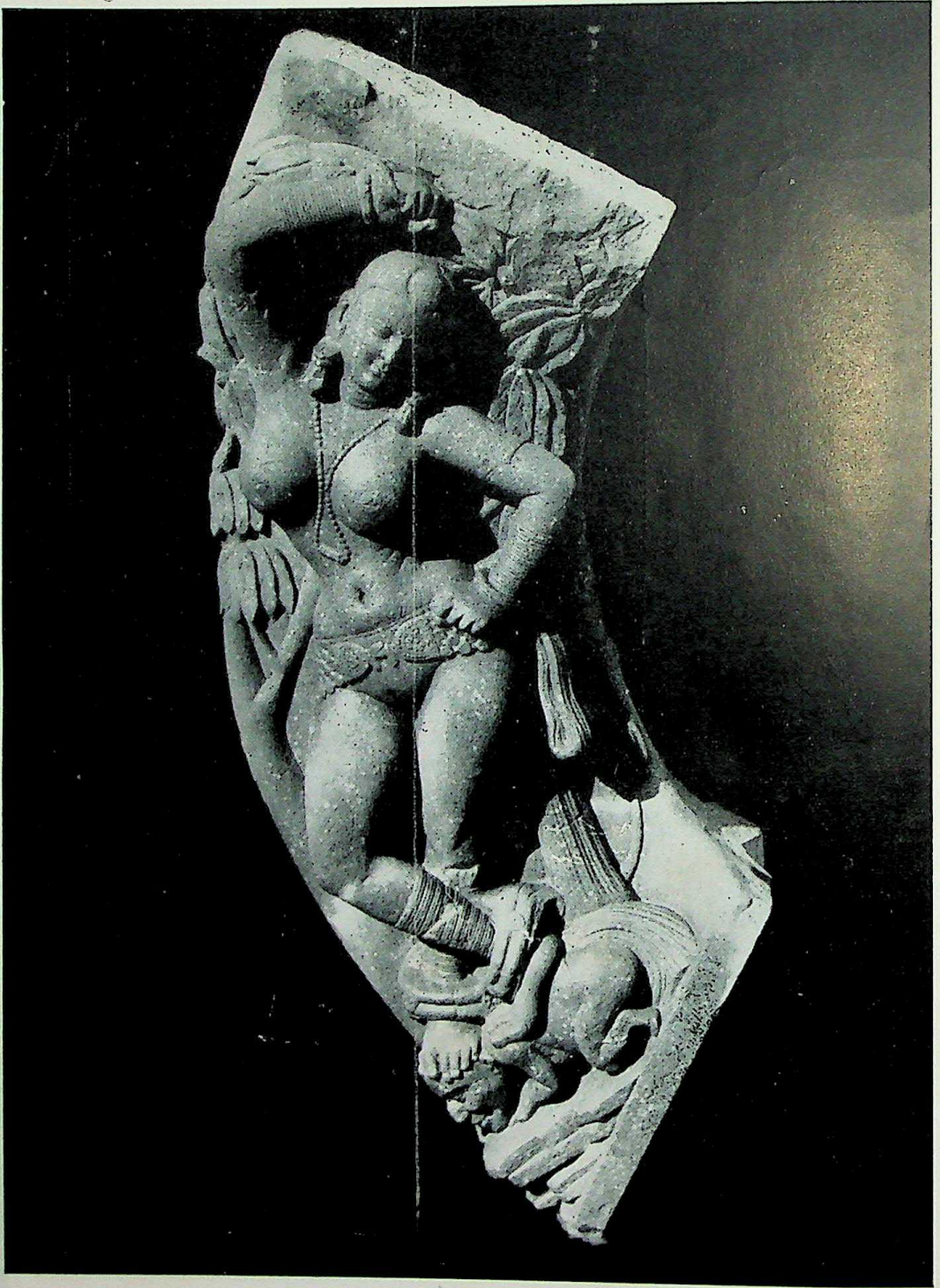


Fig. 46: Śālabhanjikā from the southern gate. Upper phase; Kanīṣka period

Level 22 was built directly on the worn-out remains of Level 23 in its late phase. This Level 22, on the other hand, while still evincing a transition as far as the size of bricks is concerned, produced the first Wima Kadphises and Kaniška I coins together with cultural objects of the Kuṣāṇa period and style. From Level 22 up to Level 16 Kuṣāṇa habitations follow in uninterrupted succession. Four of the altogether seven Kuṣāṇa levels in the mound of Sonkh, through coins, other finds and circumstantial evidence, can be connected with the following rulers:

Level 16 = Vāsudeva I / Kaniška III

Level 18 = Huviška

Level 21) = Kaniška I

Level 22)

However, the succession for Levels 17, 19 and 20 still remains somewhat uncertain because of weaker evidence.

The dating of the Kuṣāṇa levels naturally depends on the dating of Level 22 which is identified, through finds, not only as the first Kuṣāṇa, but also as the Wima Kadphises/Kaniška I level. The key is supplied by the doubtlessly close association with Kṣatrapa Level 23. In whatever way we make use of the possibility admitted before to extend the dating from the Śuṅgas to the Mitras, from the Mitras to the Kṣatrapas and the Dattas by a few decades, we would yet have to place the Kṣatrapas hardly beyond the middle of the first century A.D. Notwithstanding the theory one may follow in dating Kaniška I, after Sonkh there is no justification of placing him in the second or even in the third century A.D.

5. Some Remarkable Finds

In the course of eight excavation campaigns, more than 12,000 objects of art and articles for daily use, inclusive of fragments, were unearthed. The most voluminous were the groups of terracottas, pottery and beads followed by objects in stone, metal, glass and shell. The detailed publication on the excavation which is under preparation will show an abundance of material. From among these objects only a few which are particularly interesting and remarkable can be presented here.

Let us start with two special vessels of the *Painted-Grey-Ware Period*. The fancy pottery, after which this period has been named, with its single and combined patterns of strokes, dots and curves painted in dark colour

is represented in Sonkh by many specimens (fig. 19). A large amount of broken coloured ceramics of this type, mostly comprising bowls, dishes, small cups and flasks, were excavated. Less known is the contemporaneous *red utility ware*. Fig. 20 shows a single wheel-made vessel, 26 cm high, which to our knowledge is the largest known in the Painted-Grey-Ware-Period. The clay of the pot is mixed with chaff and terracotta splinters and not sufficiently baked. On the inner and outer side the undecorated vessel shows a coating similar in colour to its natural tinge. It was discovered in the open beside a fireplace, therefore allowing the conclusion that it was used as a water vessel. The second complete jar from the Painted-Grey-Period is much smaller but in its entirety and make another outstanding example of the common pottery (fig. 21). The ochre coloured pot is wheel-made and slightly embossed. The jar's shoulder is embellished with scratched lines and dent-in wedges. Formed like a loṭā, it certainly served as a water-jar.

Compared to these vessels, some specially striking objects of the *Maurya and Śuṅga Periods* are more figurative. First of all, there is a grey-coloured, black-slipped head of a *male terracotta* from Levels 36 to 35 (fig. 22). It is important for three reasons: 1) Its definite location allows an archaeological dating into the transition phase between the pre-Maurya and the early Maurya period, i.e. into the second half of the 4th century B.C. To our knowledge there is no other terracotta of this period that can be dated with equal accuracy. 2) The head is formed in a hitherto unknown style. Indeed, the pointed "nose-face", and the two braids of hair falling down on the forehead remind us of the beak-type, but the chignon possibly covered by cloth and tied on the left side as well as the region of the eyes and beard give evidence of a developed craftsmanship. Instead of the expected rhombic form of eyes there are clear curved lines. The remaining beard shows that it was indicated by multiple overlapping circular lines. The moustache is turned up and bent inwards in a daring curve. The nose keeps its original form with the nostrils showing at its root. The stretched neck and raised chin display self-confidence. 3) The head is also of interest for its being male whereas most of the known Maurya-terracottas are, with a few exceptions, Mātrikā-figures.

The next unusual object is a *copper triśūla* (fig. 23). Originally the needle, 8, 6 cm long, branched out into seven prongs. On either side of the thick middle-prong three bent wire spikes were soldered. One of these is missing in the excavated specimen. Presumably, it represents the oldest form of

a triśūla in Indian art. The piece was found within Level 35 and is, therefore, to be dated into the end of the 4th century B.C.

In a number of excavations in India a few strange *plaques of bone* were found. They show on their smoothed surface diagonal and horizontal strokes and small holes surrounded by circles. In Sonkh too one of these rare pieces was unearthed (fig. 24). The arrangement of circles and lines cannot be interpreted by itself, but a comparison with a more complete piece found in Prabhas Patan¹ makes it obvious that it represents the lower part of a probable female figure to be supplemented above by two horizontally arranged arms and a triangular face. Such figures may have been used as amulets. Its findspot within Level 34 sets the date in the beginning of the 3rd century B.C.

Among the *numerous coins* of Sonkh there are several specimens interesting for the numismatist. Two of them will be described here. Fig. 25 shows an irregularly oblong-shaped copper coin with one-sided stamping. The coin is die-struck. The reverse is plain, the obverse shows a lion turned to the left, standing before a dhvaja-like object. This coin measures 1, 16 x 1,84 x 0,25 cm, its weight being 2,962 grams. The type is not unknown but its attribution to Taxila is left in doubt in Allan's Catalogue of Indian Coins in the British Museum². Allan is of the opinion that such coins "are more probably from the United Provinces, as two of the B.M. specimens came from the Nelson Wright Collection and Cunningham, though he illustrates them, does not describe them under Taxila". Three such coins have been excavated at Sonkh. While one of them was found in a level rather too high, the other two came from Levels 32/33, through which they can be dated into the early Śuṅga period, i.e. in the first half of the 2nd century B.C. The finding of more than one specimen of this coin proves that Allan was right when he conjectured that they could have come from the United Provinces. However, from this evidence alone the conclusion cannot be drawn that this type of coins originated from the Mathurā District.

The second coin, selected for this report, is not less interesting (fig. 26). It is a round, die-struck copper-coin measuring 1,19 x 1,32 x 0,32 cm and weighing 1,197 grams. The reverse shows three circles representing a special type of the so-called Ujjain-symbol. The obverse surprisingly depicts a standing human figure, very similar to the well-known Śiva-before-

1. Indian Archaeology — A Review, 1956-57, p. 17, pl. XVIII.

2. Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India. London, 1936 pp. CXXXVIII f. and p. 237 f

bull-pattern of the Kuṣāṇa coins. Yet it is not even absolutely clear whether the human figure is a male. In any case, this seems to be the earliest representation of a standing figure before a bull on an Indian coin. The specimen was found in Level 29 at a safe spot and is to be dated into the second half of the 2nd century B.C.

From the later Śuṅga period, or rather from the Sūryamitra Level 27 in Sonkh, comes a small *terracotta hand* (fig. 27). It is only 3,1 x 2,3 cm large and realistically shaped as a palm, the back of which was left unfinished. A perforation channel runs from the side of the thumb to the side of the little finger, indicating that this piece was carried on a string, perhaps as an amulet. The design looks Tantric. The finger-joints are separated by pearl rings. Three symbols are marked on the palm: on the right a Svastika turning leftwards, in the centre a Nandyāvarta symbol and on the left a sign which is known as Indra-dhvaja. The latter closely resembles the symbol towards which the lion on the afore-mentioned oblong coin turns his head. Judging from the place of discovery, this piece is to be dated in the beginning of the first century B.C.

Furthermore, a large number of *votive-tanks*, more or less fragmentary, was found at Sonkh. They were used in the time from approximately 100 B.C. down to the middle ages. Three of the find-objects specially deserve to be presented here.

A rather uncommon piece is a *votive-tank* in the form of a narrow yard with four houses clustering around it (fig. 28). Three of the houses are fully preserved. They have domed roofs with three peaks each which correspond to the pinnacles on the stable structures. The houses are joined in a right angle and encircle a small courtyard. Their outer walls merge together with the wall of the vessel. The yard has only one entrance which leads through a passage into the court from where the other houses can be entered. Originally, the vessel rested on supports as indicated by some markings at its base. The remains of a step in front of the outer entrance show that a staircase led up to it. A tree seems to have grown beside the entrance; traces of its crown are still visible on the roof. Although the features characteristic of a tank can only be made out at its corners and by its fractured edges, the use of this terracotta object as a votive-tank cannot be doubted. To believe it to be a toy would be wrong in any case. The object was found in Level 26 and is to be dated in the middle of the first century B.C. As houses of this period are not preserved in the original, this small, three-dimensional specimen enriches our knowledge of

the architecture of that time. So far we had to rely solely on buildings as depicted in reliefs.

Votive-tank No. 2 (fig. 29) represents a vessel filled with water. Small clay-lamps (*pradipa*) were put in regular intervals on the walls and in between them a bird was placed. Aquatic animals like snake, fish and frog can be seen on the bottom of the vessel. A strong stalk-like pillar bears a lotus-rosette in full bloom, which is to be imagined as floating on water. A platform rests on four thick columns as well as on one side of the wall. A ladder leads down to the bottom of the vessel. An oval temple, now roofless, stands on the platform. This vessel was used for the *pūjā* in a private house. Shaped as a water-tank and with a ladder leading from the ground to the platform, our belief that here a water-god was worshipped may be justified. It is even possible that this vessel was used for a *Nāga* ritual.

Rather fragmentary but highly interesting is the *votive-tank No. 3* (fig. 30), preserved in the remains of four female figures sitting on the bottom of the vessel and carrying a bowl in their laps. The artistic quality of the figures is quite low. The faces, above all, with their crudely fixed eyes and noses convey a rather primitive impression. The significance of the piece lies in the assemblage of the figures. As between the third and the fourth figure from the left the remains of a fifth figure are preserved and one may assume that there were two more women seated on the missing opposite side, this votive-tank contained altogether seven female figures. If the fourth side was occupied by another figure, the total number would be eight. No doubt, this is a *Mātrikā* group; the object, therefore, must have been a *sāptamatrikā*- or *aṣṭamātrikā*-tank. It is not only the assumed number of figures but also the fact that probably all of them had a child in their arms which convinces us that the females represent *Mātrikās*. A part of the *pūjā* must have consisted in placing food in each bowl of the goddesses. This representation reminds us involuntarily of the late-vedic food offerings to the gods. The votive-tank comes from Level 23 and is to be dated in the last quarter of the first century B.C.

The stylistic features of the *Mātrikā* figures conform to a basic type of mother-goddess as found in several specimens in Level 23. They are solid, single terracottas of *sitting Mātrikās* with a child in the left arm (fig. 31). The head shows all the characteristics of this type: the face with the receding cheeks, the distinctly small mouth, the commanding and big nose, the narrow forehead, the stamped eyes, the prominent ears and

simple ear discs. A ribbon is laid around the root of the hair and joins behind the head at the neck. This is an exclusive object of Levels 24 and 23 at Sonkh and is to be dated in the decades shortly before or after the advent of the Christian era. However, the style of these figures does not seem to fit into the regular development of terracotta art in India. It may have been created by a tribe which immigrated to that part of the the country.

As explained in Chapter 4, quite a number of coins of different Kṣatrapas were found in the houses of Levels 24 and 23. Another informative object of a heterogeneous culture is a *seal*, stamped into a lump of clay and bearing two lines of script (fig. 32). At the lower margin of the impression, a line in Kuṣāṇa Brāhmī characters is clearly preserved. The reading runs: anaṅgabalasa; it is, therefore, the seal of a person named Anaṅgabala which is also an epithet of the god Kāma. The second line of the script is to be found at the upper margin. It is not so well-preserved, but legible all the same. The script is Kharoṣṭhī which runs from the right to the left. The reading is the same, viz. Anaṅgabalasa. Thus the seal's inscription proves to be bilingual. The piece is contemporary with the Mātrikā figure mentioned before.

Above the Kṣatrapa-Levels 24 and 23 the Kuṣāṇa habitations start with Level 22, reaching up to Level 16. A large variety of objects was found in them, but only a few remarkable pieces can be presented here:

A small lump of clay of metallic heaviness contained a rather crusty *figurative bronze* of 10, 6 cm height and 8,5 cm width (fig. 33). The object is flatly cast and in three respects of great significance: it is the first Kuṣāṇa bronze known to us from Mathurā and of high iconographical interest. To our knowledge, it is the oldest Hindustic bronze so far found in India. Two figures standing side by side on a metal pedestral are recognizable; they are surrounded by a decorative frame. This frame is apparently made up of columns and an architrave. The figures, connected with one another as well as with the frame by small bars, are those of a man and a woman, the male figure being much taller than the female. The woman has an animal head with large, round eyes and ears; there is a damaged spot near the mouth. Her right arm is bent and holds the hand with its palm up. She is carrying a child in her left arm. This female figure represents most probably an animal-headed mother-goddess. The man is also two-armed. He raises his right arm and holds the hand up with its palm turned inside. In the left suspended hand, he carries a bowl. He is dressed in a dhoti,

the knotted end of which is visible in folds between the legs. A broad, ornamental ring encircles his neck, beneath which a tie can be recognized. His hair appears to be piled up high (*jaṭā mukuta*) and is decorated with a diadem. He may have been intentionally depicted with only one ear-ring (*ekakuṇḍala*), but it is also possible that the right ear's ornament has broken off. The bronze is not yet iconographically identified. One can, for example, think of Skanda and his connection with the Mothers, but this is purely hypothetical. The male figure in its statuesque posture can be identified, also stylistically, as a product of the Kuṣāṇa period. The findspot in House C of Level 16 leads us to assume that the bronze, specially if it was used for *pūjā*, might have been handed down from generation to generation. That a bronze of this type and technique existed in Sonkh in Kaniṣka's time is proved by a second figural find.

This is a flanking figure from Level 21, 9, 3 cm high and consisting of two fragments joined together (fig. 34). Like the first piece, it is a flatly cast bronze representing a male figure with a spear in his right hand. The facial features, headdress, clothing and posture of the body are clearly Kuṣāṇa style. The shaft of the spear forms the outer margin of the object which must have consisted at least of two, if not more figures. As in the case of the first bronze, this is clearly indicated by connecting pieces at its left side. The lower part of the body dressed in a dhoti is somewhat too long. The figure, armed with a spear, can well be God Skanda; however, it could also represent one of the two guardian figures which often flank one or more goddesses in the Kuṣāṇa reliefs. Both bronzes probably belong to the same time, i.e. about 100 A.D.

A hollow plaque (fig. 35), fragmentary but interesting in its composition, proves that the potters of those days did not produce pots only. The piece is moulded out of thin clay and could be worn on a string or chain as a pendant. On the rim beside the hanging device there is a small hole through which probably globules or pebbles were inserted for the object to serve as a rattle. The reverse side shows a lotus decoration. The obverse, however, has a group of figures, superbly shaped, with an iconography that requires to be explained. It depicts an ensemble of bodies consisting of one lower and four upper parts joined in an intriguing manner. Each figure performs a different movement. Thus, the whistling man in the upper part seems to be sitting, while the clapping figure on the left appears to float. The other two figures remain in dancing or singing postures. The representation of a whistling, clapping, singing and dancing man on

the plaque is certainly in harmony with its function as a rattle. Even without being aware of its actual findspot in the Kaniṣka-level this piece, on account of stylistic peculiarities, would have to be placed in the Kuṣāṇa period.

The Kuṣāṇa level produced an abundance of *terracotta figurēs* of various divinities, predominantly those of *Kubera* and *Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardini*. Their style changes from highly artistic to simple folkart products. More important are the iconographic features as they developed from the early to the late Kuṣāṇa time. This pertains specially to the representations of *Durgā* as killer of the buffalo-demon *Mahiṣa*. There is, for instance, no indication for the killing of *Mahiṣa* with the help of a *triṣūla* in early Kuṣāṇa art. One rather wins the impression that she strangles the demonical beast. Under this aspect, the plaque illustrated in fig. 36 is of special interest. It hails from the late Kuṣāṇa Level 16, i.e. from the time of *Vāsudeva I* and depicts *Durgā* in her *Mahiṣāsuramardini* aspect. While some features, i.e. the position of the buffalo and of the two lower arms are quite familiar to us from Kuṣāṇa pieces referred to earlier, the third and the fourth arm hold the *triṣūla* in an unusual position above the head, ready to strike it down into the body of *Mahiṣa*. With this posture the act of slaying the buffalo begins to be represented by means of a long *triṣūla* shaft as it became common in the Gupta period.

The last of the remarkable objects selected for this article is a stone-relief found within the debris used as filling above Level 16 (fig. 37). It certainly did not belong to a building of the town's inner area, but was moved to the spot from an outside temple-place after the demolition of that sanctuary. The relief with an almost identical reverse side depicts the mythical bird *Garuḍa* above a curved lotus border. With wings spread out it stands upright and carries a threeheaded serpent in its beak. The body of the snake coils itself around the bird's neck and slides down behind its left wing. This serpentine line, along with leaf and blossom ornaments, produces a decorative pattern corresponding to the twiglike and raised tail of the *Garuḍa* on the reverse. Below the lotus border remains of winged animals can be seen. On comparing this object with similar pieces one may conclude that originally another curved border below the animals existed as a dividing line for a third scene adorning the relief. This two-sided relief is no doubt an architectural piece, probably a part of a tympanum. It proves that at Sonkh more than one Kuṣāṇa-temple decorated with stone-reliefs must have existed as this piece, on account of its style,

cannot have belonged to the temple described in the following chapter of this paper.

As mentioned before, only a small selection of objects from Sonkh could be discussed here. They were by no means the most attractive pieces; the intention was rather to show that it is not the artistic quality alone which decides the importance of an archaeological find.

II

EXCAVATION OF APSIDAL TEMPLE NO. 2

During the digging on the large plateau of the hill of Sonkh we came, as already reported, upon a succession of eight Kuṣāṇa levels with the remnants of houses, streets and places which were grouped around a central brick-built temple. This apsidal temple—we may call it temple No. 1—is comparatively small, but was often renovated, reconstructed and enlarged. Apparently, the walls were only plastered and not artistically decorated. It, therefore, appeared all the more astonishing that in the filling debris of the upper Kuṣāṇa levels, i.e. from Huviṣka to Vāsudeva I, fragments of Kuṣāṇa stone-reliefs and stone-railings were found again and again. As it cannot be assumed that this filling debris and these fragments were brought here from very far, there must have existed some temples with stone railings in the near neighbourhood of the mound. In the course of time the originally larger area of the hill on the eastern, western and northern sides had been ploughed by the peasants. In the south, the widespread site of Sonkh extends on the spurs of the ancient mound. In the north, the area was bounded by a river. Could the temples have stood along its banks? This question would have remained unanswered, had there not been a small area of the old elevated ground left in the midst of the fields. An old stone-sculpture had once been accidentally found at this place, which the local people began to worship. A small building constructed around this sculpture made the ground a temple site. In this way, the surrounding area of about 2,500 sqm remained untouched within the fields. The sculpture is today worshipped as Cāmardevī, i.e. Camuṇḍā, by the women of the neighbouring villages.

The temple island, as we may call it, is situated 400 m northwards to the main field of excavation, quite close to the modern canal (see fig. 2, square 6 III-V/Cb-d.) In the spring of 1971, we laid a trial-trench on the southern

side of the temple platform and came across a round structure of mud-bricks immediately below the surface. This result encouraged us to examine the site more accurately in the winter of 1971/72 and 1972/73. Very soon it became evident that the area to the south of the platform contained the remains of a second apsidal temple. Its outline is preserved in the mud-brick foundations (fig. 38). The bricks have the size of 48 x 32 x 7 cm. The structure is laid out in east-west direction with the entrance on the eastern side. In the north east corner of the entrance several layers of terracotta bricks sized 38 x 23 x 6 cm rest on the foundations. Except the entrance side the temple was surrounded by pillars, only the brick foundations of which are preserved. The size of the bricks corresponds to that of the aforementioned terracotta bricks used in the super-structure. The apse once contained a hard, round mud-floor which formed a full circle with the wall. The whole structure had a platform as its base. Some measurements may demonstrate the size of the temple: the diameter of the apsidal fundament, 60 cm high and made of mud-bricks, amounts to 3,80 m. The apsidal temple is 7,30 m long and is to be considered a closed cell with access from the east. There is evidence of a 1,60 m wide gateway framed by masonry pillars about 1,10 m in width. Judging from the finds, the gateway was paved with stone-tiles bearing reliefs. Holes of 18 cm depth are found in the bases of several pillars for insertion of the shafts. The distance from the centre of each pillar to the exterior edge of the apsis wall is about 0.85 m and that between the individual pillars fluctuates from 1,20 to 1,40 m. The size of the platform carrying the temple building is 15 by 11,50 m. Older remains of structures seem to have been covered up at the time of the temple construction with an artificial slope.

In the days of morning dew, round spots were noticed on the sides of the pillars and before the entrance, which led us to infer the presence of a deeper and wider lay-out of pillars. It was, therefore, necessary to dig out the adjacent ground as well. When doing so, an older surrounding wall and a likewise older row of pillars appeared, enclosing even the entrance front (fig. 39). The terracotta bricks of this older wall (12 x 9,50 m) are of the same measurements as the mud-bricks of the apse. The foundation bricks of the pillar group underneath have the size of 42 x 29 x 7 cm. Remains of roof-tiles were found beside the wall. This demonstrates an astonishing conformity with the findings of Level 27 of the main excavation area. Terracotta bricks of both sizes (48 cm and 42 cm) and plenty of roof-tiles of the same shape were found there within the houses. In view of the architectural

and historical development there is no doubt that this older phase of Apsidal Temple No. 2 is contemporary with Level 27. But Level 27 clearly belongs to the period of Sūryamitra who, according to the results of Sonkh, can safely be placed in the first half of the 1st century B.C.

Unfortunately, it cannot be ascertained to which cult the older sanctuary was dedicated. In the immediate surroundings not a single object in this level was found which could supply some evidence in this respect. However, the excavation of the older surrounding wall and the second group of pillars has made it clear that the foundations of the apsidal structure with its 48 cm long mud-bricks also belong to the older phase of the temple. Thus, the upper group of pillars and the super-structure with terracotta bricks sized 38 x 23 x 6 cm are to be considered parts of a second, i.e. younger apsidal temple. The size of the bricks corresponds to that of the early Kuṣāṇa levels in the main excavation area. Several coins of Wima Kadphises and Kaniṣka I were found in the temple-ground itself. A "sandwich" of coins baked together lay in one of the foundations of the upper pillars: these again are Wima and Kaniṣka coins. The dating of this phase in the early Kuṣāṇa period appears to be most plausible. Several other brick structures which supply us with a conception of the total plan were laid open in the level belonging to the upper temple-phase (fig. 40). Apparently, a courtyard extended in front of the temple-area. The structures to the north of the temple have the form of cells which were most probably grouped around a further inner court. As this is the very place on which the modern temple stands, there is no possibility to recover this part of the ground-plan. In the west and the north where, already in the old days, the ground was furrowed by pits and ditches, remains of walls were nevertheless preserved which could have belonged to an extensive and comprehensive basis-wall. But the structural design as outlined in the sketch does not allow any conclusion as to the religious use of the upper apsidal temple.

As luck would have it, numerous interesting finds conducive towards solving open questions were made in the same level of this area. Some objects excavated mainly in the eastern yard may be examined first. On the ground of the yard lay a pottery pinnacle with protuding foliated garlands around a hollow pipe (height: 40 cm). In the mud inside the cavity an iron bell with clapper was found. The same purpose as a pinnacle was most probably served by a similar, but green-glazed piece (height: 35 cm) of a more simple shape. Bigger fragments of such objects with

the same typical glaze were unearthed in the filling debris of Kaniska Level 21 of the main excavation. Beside the pipe with the bell lay a 25 cm broad terracotta Nāga-hood with originally seven cobra heads. Scratched into the snakes' heads are some auspicious symbols like Svastika and Nandyāvarta. Presumably a human face representing a Nāga had originally been under the hood. It must have been similar to the hollow terracotta head of clear Kuṣāṇa style found near the north-eastern boundary wall of the apsidal temple. In the context of other finds this head may be taken for that of a Nāga (fig. 41). From the stone fragments found in the strip to the north of the outer courtyard two pieces may be mentioned. The first is a Nāginī with the right hand in 'abhaya' mudrā and a three-headed Nāga-hood. The second represents an interesting fragment of a relief with a reading Nāga (fig. 42). Contrary to the common depiction of the Nāgas this one has an animal upper body whereas the lower part is human. On its chest folds resembling a snake-skin are recognizable. Also visible is an earring adorning the right ear. The serpent holds a book in its right hand. Another non-figurative piece from among the finds of this group is noteworthy: it is an inscribed seal with remains of three rectangular labels each having two lines of Kuṣāṇa-Brāhmī script. The beginning of their upper lines is damaged and only the last akṣaras are clear and read: *putrasa*. The lower line contains the main name: *ahikośikasa* or *ahikausi-kasa*. Without discussing the particulars of this inscription the snake-connotation of the same should be noted.

The accumulative representation of Nāgas among these finds is complemented by two other sculptures. One from a private house near the temple is a large tympanum fragment with reliefs on both sides which show a man climbing a rock. He is entwined by a snake. But he is not fighting the snake which is rather a part of him: he, in fact, is a Nāga. This piece is no doubt of Kuṣāṇa origin. The same is the case with the second sculpture, namely, the male statue around which the modern temple has been erected. The stone is carved on all four sides. On the obverse and reverse the figure is in 'abhaya' pose and hooded by a snake canopy with seven cobra-heads. On both the narrow side-portions we find a seven-limbed and seven-headed snake decorated with three lotus-stalks. The stone-figure represents no doubt a Nāga, not a Balarāma. By now, it has become quite evident that the upper phase of Apsidal Temple No. 2 at Sonkh was dedicated to the Nāga cult and that the four-sided Nāga sculp-

ture must have originally stood in its apse to be worshipped by performing *pradakṣina*. We may recall some of the Nāga inscriptions from Mathurā District, such as the one from Dadhikaṛṇa, telling us of a Nāga shrine, the architecture of which has never been a point for discussion, because we have no basic information about it.

While digging the surrounding area of the apsidal temple quite a number of more or less tiny fragments of Mathurā sandstone came to light. It was only in the southern strip that the finds were arranged in a certain order. And indeed, this is the place where we found the most important objects. Scattered in this southern area were small heaps of bricks and stones. Most of the stones were *sūcīs*, i.e. crossbars of a railing, carved on both sides with lotus rosettes. One of the *sūcīs* shows by its oblique shape that it belonged to a staircase-railing. Still more interesting is the fragment of a *stambha* with a medallion carved in the upper half of the pillar. It depicts the figure of a Nāga with a canopy of seven cobra-heads. The lower body of the Nāga consists of a snake's tail. The hand of its up-lifted right arm carries a lotus-stalk. The Nāga motif is repeated in another *stambha* where, in the lower half-medallion, the heads of three cobras are visible.

More to the east of the southern strip of land another group of bigger stone pieces came to light. The finds of an architectural lion and two cubic blocks with marvellous carvings one of which showing, of course, the inevitable Nāga again, clearly indicate that they belong to a gate and were originally placed on and in between the architraves. Unfortunately, not much of that gate has survived. But the few pieces which we were able to find have been worth all our endeavours. There are three projecting ends of architraves and the middle beam of the bottom lintel. The pieces are carved on both sides, but those sides which — in the excavation spot — were showing upwards, are nearly completely weathered and defaced. Thus, only one side of the carvings is preserved, but that luckily is in mint condition.

Firstly, there is the western end of the top lintel depicting an elephant with a *makara* body who carries a lotus-stalk in his trunk. The next piece being the western end of the bottom lintel (fig. 43) shows a *makara* and in front of it a male Nāga with a snake-hood curling up behind his head. With his right leg he steps out of the jaws of the ogre. This piece fits

exactly together with the most exciting relief from Sonkh, namely, the large middle beam of the bottom lintel which is significant for its artistic quality as well as for its content (fig. 44).

The panel shows in the centre of the scene a Nāgarājā and a Nāginī. To the right two female servants carry the royal emblems: a chowrie and an umbrella. Both are characterized as Nāginīs by a single snake-hood rising behind the head. The three male persons on the same side are likewise marked as Nāgas by similar snake-hoods. The last Nāga attendant in the scene is the girl standing beside the seated Nāginī; she holds a necklace, just handed over to her by her mistress with the intention to make it a present to the leader of a visiting group. The delegation consists of three adult Brāhmaṇas, four young men (ascetics or disciples) and four children. The tallest child delivers a long garland, which is just being accepted by the king. At the moment, it is too early to offer a convincing interpretation of the scene. But one observation should be added: normally, a Nāga queen is placed to the left of the king and has two cobras less in her canopy than the ruler. Here, the Nāginī shows the same number of snake heads in her canopy, and she sits to the right of the Nāgarājā. Since she also behaves like the commanding person in the scene, she may not be his queen at all. The relevant literature seems to offer only one name fitting the situation of a female Nāga with the powers of a king: Jaratkārū, the sister of the Nāga King Vāsukī. However, the final interpretation will have to be worked out later.

In this connection I wish to acquaint the reader with an extraordinary fact: from the mould shown in figure 45 it can be proved that the potter of the time when the gate was erected used to take moulds directly from the stone reliefs. Here we see the group of children from the Nāga relief. Another piece of terracotta find shows that those moulds have actually been used for the production of small plaques:

The last piece from the gate of Apsidal Temple No. 2 at Sonkh showed in situ the same mutilation as the others with dim outlines of the original sculpture. The relief, however, revealed a reverse in perfect condition with a *Sālabhañjikā* of the highest artistic quality, surpassing all Mathurā Kuṣāṇa Yakṣis known so far (fig. 46). The lady stands on a dwarf-like figure, whose facial expression is one of utmost joy. This female figure does not indicate any connection with Nāgas, except for her anklets which have the shape of a snake with a seven-headed canopy.

The Śālabhañjikā is the last of the remaining pieces from the southern gate at Sonkh, and there is no hope for more. The excavation of the upper structure of Apsidal Temple No. 2 is completed. However, the results, though not presented here in all details, are sufficiently clear: the apsidal temple was dedicated to the Nāga cult, and it was partly or fully enclosed by a stone-railing with a highly artistic gate.

THE RESULTS OF THE EXCAVATIONS AT SONIA
The excavations at Sonia are the last of the remaining pieces from the southern
part of Sonia and there is nothing for which the excavation of the north
structure of Sonia Temple No. 2 is completed. However, the results
though not presented here in all details are sufficiently clear. The results
remains are devoted to the final result and was partly or fully covered
by a stone railing with a highly ornate gate.

